

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: SAILING MID-LIFE'S SEAS: THE JOURNEYS OF
VOYAGING WOMEN

Barbara A. Schaefer, Doctor of Philosophy, 2003

Dissertation directed by: Professor Francine H. Hultgren

Department of Education Policy and Leadership

The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning of mid-life women's everyday life as amplified by the experiences of those who have chosen to live on board sailboats. Significant themes are revealed through hermeneutic phenomenological methodology and developed using the powerful metaphor of the sea. Nine women took part in several in-depth conversations with the researcher about their experiences of sailing and living on board a sailboat. Their stories and reflective thoughts, coupled with literary and philosophic sources reveal the deeper meaning of the ordinary experiences of this extraordinary way of being in the world.

Voiced by mid-life sailing women, the metaphor of the sea and the ways sailors navigate through "God fearing" forces provide the slate for the writing of this work's main themes. The research opens us to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon in such themes as relationships with Nature, others, self and possessions; simplification of life; realization of total freedom; and the reconsideration of women's perceptions of time and place.

Through the unique voice of sea women, the knowledge created from within these themes illuminates ways familiar patterns of existence can be opened up to yield new meaning. Through this research we come to know ways in which various educational venues of a lived life can serve as a forum for reshaping women's perspectives and supporting their personal growth. We learn that the mid-life woman's reconsidered images of self as revealed through her lived experience will reshape the ways she interacts in the world.

This work is also a personal accounting of the lived experience of the researcher who went to sea in order to experience the life as described by the study's participants. Her voiced echoing of the themes identified by the women in the study brings their meaning to further depth. The lived themes resonate with new meaning as mid-life women come to a new way of thinking about fundamental issues which, in turn, makes them agents of change in a global community.

SAILING MID-LIFE'S SEAS:
THE JOURNEYS OF VOYAGING WOMEN

by

Barbara A. Schaefer

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2003

Advisory Committee:

Professor Francine Hultgren, Advisor and Chair

Dr. Gloria Carpeneto

Dr. Barbara Fowler

Associate Professor Jing Lin

Associate Professor Marylu McEwen

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the two beings whose loving support made it possible. My husband, Tom, whose ever present energy and positive attitude kept me on task and whose occasional blessed absences gave me the opportunity to devote to this undertaking. Making this voyage to meaning possible, he is the wind in my sails.

I also dedicate this work to Dick the Dog, my “study buddy,” now deceased. His unconditional love and “needing to be with” warmed my lap during the early hours of the morning when writing outweighed my need for sleep.

Finally, to my constant reminders of the journey that awaits, this work is dedicated to the Sea itself and the women who sail upon it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the uncertain time known as “mid-life,” this research has opened me to consciousness about my own circular journey to enlightenment.” Without a conscious appreciation of the foundations for being in the world, knowledge passes us by. This research serves as a text for use in the classrooms of life whose meaning-filled lessons are found in everyday ways.

I wish to thank my father who introduced me to the ways of the sea, my mother who is my inspiration for navigating mid-life waters and beyond, my big brother Tom, and his wife Kathy who exemplify a family’s loving way. I also dedicate this work to all the women sailors whose lives serve as my constant reminder of the creative and inspirational ways women have negotiated being in the world.

My sincere appreciation goes to my committee members: Francine Hultgren, Gloria Carpeneto, Barbara Fowler, Jing Lin, and Marylu McEwen. Their thoughtful enthusiasm and insightful comments helped shape this effort into a scholarly work.

I also want to acknowledge the enthusiasm and support of the women in my study and from the sailing communities of Annapolis and Havre de Grace, Maryland and Seattle, Washington--including the Seattle Women’s Sailing Association. All of these women made themselves available and inspired me with hours of endless stories. A heartfelt appreciation goes to Becky Bryson for her inspirational thoughts about sailing in the “real world” of the sea and for permission to print excerpts from her personal sailing journals. I am grateful for the friendships provided to me by

colleagues from the Hermes Circle, especially Mary, Stacey, and Staley, who encouraged me and followed the progress of this work.

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CHAPTER ONE: TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON OF SAILING

Beings Aground

I am aground. I am a being aground. My very Being is ungrounded. Aground, I am ungrounded. Aground, I am both stuck and aimlessly wandering. “Beings aground” are persons “on the shore or bottom, as a vessel stranded” (Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary, 1992, p. 29). So we are at mid-life, stranded on the shores of our lived lives looking toward our horizon of yet lived moments. Our feet are stuck in the sand, feeling as if we should feel more, looking for “more” anywhere we can find it; we gaze out to sea.

Take me away
today, today.
Free of the land,
I am.
Called by the sea,
come with me.
So let’s go
to the sea
sail with me. (Schaefer, 2001)

My mid-life vessel has hit bottom--being stopped after moving freely, feeling the sudden lurch of finding the bottom, coming to a complete standstill. Being aground is a sailor’s greatest fear.

I am a nurse of 27 years, who at age 50, feels grounded. I know little about my capacity to care and nurture outside of this technical life. As a nurse, I am skilled in the art of healing; energy flows from me to my patients. At mid-life, I feel my energy wane and have little left to give. I need renewing and revitalization before actively caring for others in my life. Family and friends feel the neglect caused by my chosen

career. I, in turn, feel guilt, sadness and isolation from them. Why in my middle years do I turn to the sea and living on a boat as a possible solution? As the focus of my next decade, is the sea a place that will help me rejuvenate caring ways? Do I instinctively seek the water as a place to help me transcend the old ways?

Standing on deck with just a little movement from my foundation, the sea, I float. Living on a boat one floats all of the time. Feet touch ground only when required. What does it mean to live on top of the water, above the earth? Husserl calls it the layer between the world of Nature and the world of spirit, the life world (Husserl, 1970). It is the space O'Donohue sees "as the place between air and earth. This is where the soul lives" (1997, p. 125).

Is the bottom of the sea really the top of the earth? Is hitting the bottom the opportunity for mid-life women to float through the life world, reach its surface and breathe the air of another way? I seek another way of experiencing my life. I want to peel away the layers of accustomed ways and uncover yet another way, a way that has been waiting for my discovery for 50 years, a mid-life point of being.

My body talks to me in a language of subtle feelings. I must listen carefully to the messages or they are missed. Tensions and harbored ill will lead to disease. "Disease" means "dis" + "ease" or without ease--lack of ease, lack of an easier way through the day. Does our being body-wise mean we will be trouble free? Perhaps not completely, but listening to our internal gauges may lessen the toll of fleeting moments of pain and agony experienced in this temporary home. Knowing that one

day we will leave this home of flesh and bone, we anticipate our entry into dreamtime from whence we came.

Our Lives Defined by Place

Mary, my friend, describes a “normal” life as one defined by a childhood place in her mother’s house. Raised by loving parents, who guarded and supported her, when both were removed through death, she was left with a groundless feeling of floating, like me. Her life of normalcy, my life of eccentric episodes, we both cry and wonder what is next? What do we do now? Who will help us through the daily trials? This place we put ourselves, surrounded by others that cohabit the space, matters. Remembered places shared with others and remembered experiences of being in place with others are vehicles for personal transformation. The power of our nostalgic place, and of our current place, is not to be underestimated; it is the body experiencing both places that creates the transformation.

So why choose the eccentric place, the place of the few to live my life? Why the place of water, motion and continual place changing? The place of our choosing can be a place for transformation. To situate self in special places provides a view of the horizon, the elusive horizon that recedes from our grasp, but forever our lure. Our chosen place has special nears and fars and motions and stillnesses. I am here but for there. I am up only for knowing where down is. I am inside out, revealed. In bodily being and in mind’s being, I am in two places at once. I am all over my places at the same time. Is staying focused, not split, and remaining in the present the way to transcendence? Or, is my multi-placement the key to another way?

Power of place. Mary, you weep. The power of your remembered childhood place, your house, moves you to tears as the nostalgia overcomes and you remember lost others. I run from nostalgic places that cause me painful memories of times better forgotten and left in the past. I seek other places, not for quiet repose, but because I know I can not be placeless. “Place pathology” (Casey, 1993, p. 38), or lack of place, can cause my own demise, depression and estrangement from others. I have experienced that for a time in my wanderings. I know the way of the depressed, and I know that being without place can lead to a very dead end. So, in my sea place, I establish a sense of place in the world, not alone, but surrounded by others of like persuasion.

Sea sisters in place on the waterways.
 Sea people in place on moving currents.
 Water women in place on the wisps of wind.
 Aqua folk in place migrating, following the sun.
 (Schaefer, 2001)

Why a place on the water? Why live out of the “normal” way and choose the seaway? The sea is a place of extremes. One day the sun is out and the next it storms. It is an eccentric way of hardship and great reward.

Eccentric place--the sea. Art and Judy are sailing today. They are on their way to a new place. As winter closes in, they are sailing to the Caribbean in search of warmth. Their place is eccentric and extreme. Today they experienced 12 foot swells as their boat “beats to windward” against 30 knot winds. I can imagine what their world is like. This sea state would cause them to be living on a 30 degree angle, moving through the water at eight knots, pounding through the surf with a constant up

and down motion. The wind and spray chill their damp bodies. They would be tired from little sleep, their night watch-making causing sleep deprivation. They would remain ever vigilant, however, because inattention in such harsh conditions would leave them vulnerable. They would be watching for rigging failure, and signs of weakness in the boat. Their place would be noisy as the wind howls in the rigging, and the pots and pans, housed behind cabinet doors, clang about from the constant motion. Some people have described being aboard a moving boat at sea like living in a house being shaken by an earthquake. The earthquake does not stop, however; it can go on for days or weeks. So, why do we sail out to sea? Why do women seek this shaking, quaking place in mid-life? My mother was a sailor, and she once told me that sailors go to sea because it feels so good when they return to port.

The other extreme of the ocean voyage is that stopping place called port. Ports of placid lagoons with turquoise water exist in the sea world. Happy couples drinking pina coladas on the decks of clean white boats inhabit this place. This is the other extreme of my sea place. This is not a paradise found, it is a paradise earned--a place realized only having experienced the extremes of a voyage at sea. Paradise found is expressed in a glance shared between members of a sailing crew. Their gaze confirms to the other that they survived the passage. The strength of their bond was tested and measured in their wet weather world. The bond created between men and women is forged by their complete dependency on the other for survival in a moving place forever unfolding. Their place of testing becomes their place of resting. Mary, that describes your "normal" world, too.

Our Lives Defined by Others

Mid-life is a time defined by the presence of others in our lives--others remembered and others in our day-to-day world. Looking around us at our midpoint, we see their faces in memory and in presence. We consider their importance in our lives and reflect on how they shaped us. I am a childless sailing woman. Who will own my face? What does it mean to go childless in the world, to leave no one of my flesh behind? I look at my husband and see the face of his father. I look in a mirror and see the face of my mother. We own their faces. Is this the essence of human life, owning the face of one who has gone before us? What do we really leave behind in our wake when we leave this world, a face? Childless couples leave no wake. They leave no faces or human legacy behind. Is having a child like leaving a wake? Is not having a child like making a trackless path? Am I a trackless nomad?

Perhaps childless couples leave remains of another kind. They leave the written word, pictorial images, remembered ways, inspired lives touched, and examples of living life with gusto! Through phenomenology, I am coming to terms with my childless life of leaving a faceless legacy. Coming to terms with my mid-life place, by studying my relation to the sea, I have come to know that I, too, leave a track. My moving place leaves a lasting mark. No one is trackless; even a sailor leaves a wake that ripples through the water, ripples that travel to the horizon--to infinity. Is this what the sea has taught me? My journey to transcendence is lasting, another star in the night sky for all to see and follow.

“Other” relationships are considered at sea. A boating community consists of a gathering and re-gathering of migratory nomads. Boating people come together at night when anchors are dropped. In the morning, or soon after, they disperse. This pattern repeats itself daily. Like a kaleidoscope, the leaving, uniting and reuniting movement of sea vessels causes unique patterning. Every second of the day, a re-patterning array of unique proximal beings forms in the anchorage.

When they come together in an anchorage, each boat chooses a position that maintains a distance from others to avoid collisions; yet, they remain close enough to include all in the space. Patterning is random and related to the length of the boat and type of ground tackle (anchors). The anchoring dance begins when a boat approaches an anchorage and determines the exact place to set anchor. Common purpose, proximity and compatibility drive the choices. Funny how that dance mirrors human relationships. In life, we choose our friends based on proximity, common purpose and compatibility. Can an anchorage be a metaphor to further understanding about relationship building? What do relationships have to do with the sea life and a woman’s choice to be at sea?

Sailing women living among an anchorage’s re-patterning of beings are exposed to opportunities for relationship building that far exceed that of the land. Our neighbors change daily; our neighborhoods constantly reform. What does a re-patterning of this magnitude mean for women’s relation to others? Are there more opportunities for appreciating the impact of “Other” on the lived?

Mid-life, mid-point, middle--we exist in in-between places. The phenomenon of sailing as a journey through the “mids,” is about a point of tension, a between spot, a jumping off place or precipice. Sailing is about living with others in the tension of the moment as we look over the edge to a new place, new way of being, new horizon. Hands held with others, we step off the land onto a new platform, one that feels different to the tread of tired feet.

Tension is created when one leaves the land behind to set sail for the sea. I immerse myself in the tension which compels me to push off the dock to horizon. My immersion exposes present and past lived ways, and I want to sail away from them sail away from the day to day tedium. My immersion in the tension informs me of a hidden purpose that I hunger to know. This passage will acquaint me with that which is hidden from the visible. It will help answer my question. **“What is the lived experience of mid-life women who have chosen the sea way as sailor?”** Exploring that phenomenon starts with my call to the sea.

Raising the Sail at Mid-life: My Call to the Sea

I have been diagnosed with Osteoporosis. “Osteo” and “porous” mean “bone with pores” or spaces within the bone (Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary, 1992).

“Osteoporosis”

Spaces between places,
I hear they are empty.
Places between spaces,
I hear they are not.
Consider,
spaces between places,
teaming with light, supporting the soul.
Consider,

places between the spaces,
dense impenetrable, supporting the physical. (Schaefer, 2001)

I stand at the helm preparing to raise the main sail. I must position my body just so, with knees bent and back straight, so when I bend the “main sheet” on the “winch” I do not pull a muscle or tear something, making me an invalid for the rest of the sailing season. I test myself on this boat. Each year I measure myself against the task ahead. Each year I wonder will I be strong enough, agile enough and brave enough to take this boat to the places in my dreams. I hear the tick of the body clock, as each moment, weekend, year on the land seems to fly by. I gaze back at my mate standing at the helm, each year another crop of gray hair on his head. It is nearly all silver now. Do not tell him I said so.

I stand on the deck afraid--not of rough seas or dangerous oceans, but of missed chances to sail with a vigorous youthful body, to say, “I love you” to those that matter, to celebrate the moment, to be at peace. What is it about being on a boat that brings me to these moments of acute awareness of looking backward and forward at the same time? I gaze around at all the things I love and I am afraid of losing them. They came so fast in life and now, at mid-life, I am afraid they all will disappear.

I pull on the sheet, and I wind the “winch;” the heavy mainsail is 12 inches from the top of the 48-foot mast. I pull and wind with all of my strength until it reaches the top. Thank God, I was able to do it again--another season begins. I engage the “cleat,” locking the sail in place, signal to my mate to “kill” the engine and we sail. We are now moving under the power of the wind at an angle of 30 degrees to the wind. When a boat is 30 degrees off the wind, it is called being on a “close haul.” To

be close hauled is to have the sails adjusted so they are close to the boat's hull. This increases boat speed through the water. Mid-life women are on a "close haul" to the next moment as we speed toward a vanishing horizon. "I love you" escapes from my mouth, and my mate smiles knowing, too, how precious each moment is.

Being Anxious--The Core of Being

I am anxious about the speed of life's passing and of lost time. Anxiety is described by Heidegger (1953/1996) as a basic state of the human mind. By experiencing anxiety, we begin to understand who we are. Through it we find the meaning of our Being. Sanfranski (1998) states, "In the face of anxiety everything sinks to the ground stripped of all significance...that which anxiety consumes also lays bare the hot kernel of the Being" (p.152). Anxiety frees a being to choose itself and take hold of its self. Anxiety isolates in two respects. It breaks the tired bonds to fellow beings and it lets the individual drop out of her familiar relationships with the world (Sanfranski). In this free fall state, being becomes actualized.

Do we need anxiety all the time in order to "lay bare the hot kernel of the Being" (Sanfranski, 1998, p. 152)? Can we find our Being without anxiety? Memories return and I am 10 years old again sitting on the bow of my father's aluminum boat. Going full speed across the water, we rush forward in space. Again, I can not contain my voice, and I begin to sing a few verses of the Alleluia Chorus. I face forward and sing with full voice. I feel my father's smile behind me, but I am too shy to look him in the eye. I sing with abandon, and I again feel the warmth in my chest over my heart.

What is it about the sea and water that release my spontaneous voice? What compels me to “sound off” and explode in vocal joy? Is it my age that permits it? Is it total release brought on by my presence in Nature? Is it my Being laid bare by the all encompassing presence of Nature? Nature and anxiety, together, will help me explore the place of my returning, the place of a woman in mid-life. Is not the sea the perfect place to experience both? Through nomadic meandering, we undertake an anxious journey on Nature’s watery ways.

Nomadic Being

Sailing is both a reality and a metaphor for my journey. Sailing has become a way of meaning making during mid-life. Being at the helm of a boat, and sailing it across the sea to unknown lands, describes a nomadic journey through a time called mid-life. Is sailing for women with nomadic leanings, or do women seek sailing because it lends itself to the wanderlust?

For untold centuries the Nomads lived in the desert; they lived there from choice. All of them scorned the easier life of lesser men. Valuing freedom above all else, they took a fierce pride in the very hardship of their lives, forcing unwilling recognition of their superiority on the townsmen and villagers who feared, hated and despised them. (Thesinger, 1980, p. 60)

Catherine DeLorme, a sailor and author of the article, “Reflection on a Decade in the North Atlantic,” speaks of the nomadic life and the relationships it fosters.

Many find it strange that we left behind good salaries and normal lives to live like Bohemians. One of the interesting things about friendships when we travel is that because we know we may not stay in a given place long, we tend to get into it more deeply more quickly. Very few of our friends stay in touch with us. We sometimes detect a kind of jealousy because they see us as always on holiday while they are working hard and long. Of course, this is

less than the truth because with our alleged freedom comes more problems to solve than you find in a normal life ashore. We step back from a regular way of life, and society in a way rejects us in turn. This is not a new phenomenon; those who are different often are not accepted, especially those who are nomadic, but it was a surprise for us nonetheless. Overall, it has allowed us to see the difference between our real friends and those who end up being more like mere acquaintances. (DeLorme & Calle, 2001, p. 34)

Sailing in mid-life has given DeLorme a lens that defines her life as a nomad and helps her discern who really cares about her. Like Catherine, I seek a nomadic way to journey to new places that yield opportunities for genuine relationships.

“Sail with Me”

Come sail with me.
Close your eyes and we are together.
My world is simple; it comprises the here and now.
It exists solely in the present.
People migrate to it,
pass through it,
wonder about it.
It is a world distilled to its primordial elements.

Come sail with me.
I will show you another way.
Sip some wine.
Tell a tale.
Rock with the motion of the earth.
Feel the air pass through your eyes and float.
You can be anywhere. You are no where.
You are in the heart of god. (Schaefer, 2001)

Catherine talks about leaving normal life behind.

The hardest part of the sailing life is to make the decision to do it--to leave behind a lifestyle that offers so much comfort and security. Normal life weaves a reassuring net around us, which alternately provides safety or confines us like a prison. For us, we left without having any confidence that our future or old age would be secure. We were far from having all the answers before we cast off--but we are on our way. We left because we knew that “success” for us would come with leaving, not with staying. (DeLorme & Calle, 2001, p. 34)

Nearing age 51, I am nomadic in my mind as I begin a journey toward transcendence, toward another way of being. Nomads know no borders; they cross boundaries. Like a nomad, I seek new spaces and places to explore and dwell, but there is more to it than that. I seek a deeper understanding of what it means to Be. I am not concerned only about where I go, but how I live on my way there. This is a different frame of reference than found in my earlier years.

In 1981, I moved to Saudi Arabia, the land of nomads, yet I was unable to realize the transcending nomadic state of a mid-life mind. I collected memories of my travels for the next three years, and described them in letters to my mother, a woman with a passion for travel. Fulfilling her dreams by making them my own, I traveled the world. This activity, I thought, would help us connect in unspoken ways. Is looking back to lived places and important others part of my journey forward to another way?

I used Saudi Arabia as a jumping-off place from which to see the world. Saudi is a place of tension, a place of “never knowing what tomorrow will bring.” For the next three years, I lived the life of a nomadic wanderer. My letters home read like a travel book, the voice of a 30-year-old caught in the world of technical describing. I talked about “going to” places but not of “being in” the places. I collected countries, cities and famous locations. I took pictures and bought exotic treasures, physical remains from my captured places. I was caught up in the act of “going to the place” and not being “of the place” or “in the lived space.” My thoughts

and actions changed me, but they were not transforming. I did not know how to use the tension and anxiety of that special time to expand my Being.

That was then, and here I am now, 20 years later, a woman in mid-life with a depth demanding more from experiences. At mid-life, my lens views life differently as I seek transcending ways. At age 30, seeking “tension-free” places to reside, I experienced only physical place. At age 50, I appreciate the tensions found in eccentric place choices, and realize the tensions found in place can be used to uncover Being.

“Nomadic Me”

I want to be a traveler.
I want to wander the globe.
I seek other places and special spaces
To go and find who I am.

I found treasures in far off lands,
Places and experiences collected.
Now I seek tension in anyplace spaces,
To reflect and find who I am.

I cross over boundaries.
I leave the land.
Through mid-life reflection.
I find who I am.

Courage is the nomadic way.
No trail to follow; the wind the say.
I leave the land for the sea,
Nomadic oceans breathe for me. (Schaefer, 2001)

A New View of Place

A nurse combines technical excellence with a caring nature. Our way of being is reflected in the Medical Model's problem solving approach to caring for patients. This model dissects, reduces and evaluates diseases and treatments in an effort to cure the patient of illness. It is the way of the technical. At mid-life, I find myself drowning in the technical life; the tedious day-to-day repetitive actions, though important to the patient, weigh me down. Throw me a mid-lifeline! I need a new view, a new place of being. I choose this temporal place of now, mid-life, to be on a boat at sea. At midlife, I leave the technical behind to enter new space.

My place on a boat at sea redefines my relationship with objects and others. Being next to new things and beings changes my perspective and reshapes me. My place is altered by my renewal, and my renewal is altered by my place. My place is beyond the technical. I look back to look ahead to another way. As I change within my place, I affect the rest of the world.

Changing places. Our life journey progresses through a series of threshold crossings (Palmer, 2000). We step from one room into the next phase of our life, and with each expansive move, we discover opportunities for reflection and learning. We feel the draft as the air propels us on our way; one door opens and another door closes behind us, a door opens and another closes, open and close, open and close. As we sail the currents of wind, the breathing planet moves us along.

Voyagers lose track of crossed thresholds. The work-a-day places of our every day lives run together, and one day we are blown into a room that is cramped

and close; we feel stifled. We wonder, “How did I get here?” The doors and rooms of my life, from age 23 to 50, are a blur of memories; it takes effort for me to bring them forward. Now, however, is the time of my mid-life reflection and I am compelled to look back and answer, “What is next?” Before venturing across the next threshold, Bateson (1994) reminds me that the way to learning requires that I must look behind and remember past rooms. It is only through coming to know the meaning of my past experiences that I will come to know the experience of living within the spacious, illuminated rooms which lie ahead. The rooms awaiting me are lit with the light of possibility and command a breathtaking view of my next horizon.

A door opens--I am 23 years old and a newly graduated registered nurse. Sensing a void in my life, I came to nursing because I wanted to be with others in a deeper and more meaningful way. Providing care to patients, I experienced with them their real-life dramas of giving birth, healing wounds, and experiencing pain. Nursing enables one to be with another during their most fundamental and vulnerable times, an experience that I needed to have. Over the course of the years, before leaving this room, I had taken my first trip to Europe and became aware of global others with different ways of being in the world--the door closes.

Another door opens--the wind pushes me through the threshold framing a hospital located in the deserts of Saudi Arabia. I am a nursing supervisor in a small Saudi hospital. Up and up I climb the professional ladder, and as I climb, I find myself farther and farther from the patient's bedside, the place of my nursing purpose. I entered the room labeled “Nursing Administrator.” It was filled with rule

books and policies to govern the practice of hospital administration. I found the room to be uncomfortable, and I ran out the door after three years. Palmer (2000) sheds some light on the lived ways of administrators. He says those in charge can cast either shadows or light on the lives of others who dwell in the work place. Failure to look at our shadowy side causes us to live in a delusion that our efforts are well intended, our power is benign, and everyone else has a problem except for the leader. He suggests that even the most dismaying time of life can be illuminating when we learn what it has to teach us. He suggests we face the shadow casting fears of the work place wrapped in the garb of “friendship and inner discipline” (Palmer, 2000, p. 103). Perhaps, if I had heard Palmer’s words earlier in my career, I would have made changes in my working ways. Instead, I left the room of nursing administration and moved on. Over the course of the years, before leaving this room, I twice journeyed around the world visiting Tanzania, Egypt, Hong Kong, Thailand, Japan, India, the former Yugoslavia, the former USSR and all of Western Europe--the door closes.

Another door opens--I have chosen yet another nursing management job overseeing the professional practice of a nursing force in a large metropolitan hospital. The labor issues brought before me from a unionized nursing force reinforced my unease with the administrative career path, and after three more years of wielding power over others, the wind moves me on. Heidegger (1953/1996) reminds us that “inauthentic ways” (p. 166) of being in the world can cause persons to withdraw into themselves. At this point, I was 33 years old, and my feelings of withdrawal from others loomed in sharp contrast to my original intentions for

becoming a nurse. I left the world of administrative nursing. Over the course of the years, before leaving this room, I visited China, Russia, Mongolia and India--the door closes.

Another door opens--I enter the world of educational oversight and manage a staff whose job it was to evaluate the educational credentials of foreign educated nurses working in the United States. This was both an administrative and technical role, but it enabled me to be creative as I redeveloped some of the organization's operational systems. The role facilitated a more open approach to the others who worked for me. It was if the creative energy spent on revamping old operational systems provided the key to my interacting with others in a deeper way. I began to feel a more meaningful and satisfying way of being in the work world. I remained in this position for seven years and during that time I traveled to Mali, Australia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador before the door began to close.

Another door opens and a large wind pushes me through. At age 40 I begin to look behind me for ways to recapture my "23-year-old" character. This was a time of deep reflective thinking coupled with spontaneous action, a combination of forces which I blame for compelling me to purchase my first sailboat. Having come from a sailing family, this creative, impulsive purchase provided me with a way of being in the world that felt "just right." I proceeded to sail boats with my husband for the next seven years. The door to this windy room remains open as the wind keeps coming in, filling me with bright ideas. World travel has stopped while I dwell in this room. I am content with the shorter trips taken on my boat. Sailing satisfies my need to wander.

Sailing has brought me to an authentic place of being in the world that is more in keeping with my nature. Palmer (2000) helps me realize that failure to live in accordance with my true nature will “deplete myself and harm the other as well” (p. 50). Going against our nature closes the doors ahead and deprives us of air. Rather than burning brightly in a room that is open and illuminated by a view of endless possibilities, we burn out in the small, closed, and stifling room. I have chosen to follow my nature on the sea, and my door has remained open. As a result, I have realized many successes. I have taken faculty positions teaching nursing and clinical jobs in hospitals teaching others the bedside skills of nursing. Teaching others has somehow bridged the gap between my career path and successfully being with others. As my teaching style makes me a student among students, I have been able to connect with others under my tutelage in deeper and more meaningful ways. I credit my chosen way of being in the world as a sailor with bringing me to my true nature.

The door to this room of becoming remains open. At age 48, I began the work of this dissertation, a continuation of my coming to know my true nature, the meaning of my chosen world way. All the doors and windows of this room are wide open, as the wind continues to blow through it, revealing chambers of dwelling behind and in front of me. I look forward and backward with curiosity, but mostly I look inward, to my true nature, for that is where meaning lies.

As I turn 50 years old, I consider how the past technical ways of my nursing education and the experiences of world travel provided me with the underpinnings to keep moving forward to the next rooms of my life. The meaning of *technical* is “art,

skill or craft” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 798). This reconsideration of the technical brings me to know my past technical career as a training ground for the creation of my next work of art. My past profession as a clinical and administrative nurse has provided me with the desire and the means to buy a boat, and it has taught me the art and craft of applying knowledge to the accomplishment of personal goals. My extensive travel opened my eyes to different and diverse ways of living in the world. Not until I approached my chronological age of 50, did I fully appreciate the life-giving gift of my technical career and years of happy wandering. Only now, standing on a firm foundation of knowing ways, do I see how my nursing career and global vision have brought me to a new starting point, mid-life.

Play space. I am so busy with living; I no longer have time for career. Having traveled up a shallow stream of jobs, I have reached the dry headlands of my career. Now, I search for another way of being. When did this happen? What dislodges us from the land and plunges us headlong into the sea? Does one see “X” number of sunsets and something goes snap, telling us that it is time to find another way, telling us it is time to play?

Is sailing playtime? Fellow sailors would say, “No,” claiming sailing to be a lifestyle that requires hard work. But, what is play if not joy realized after total freedom from routine activity? Can our day to day activities become play?

“Play with Me”

Can you come out and play with me?
 Can you come out and sail with me?
 Run on the waves and blow in the breeze.
 Abandon the norm be eccentric with me.

Let's take this work-a-day way and turn it into play.
Ring around the rosie, a pocket full of responsibility,
More and more and we all fall down. (Schaefer, 2001)

I am 10 again, and my memory takes me to my friend's house where I am playing Barbie dolls. I remember a thought coming to me as clear as a bell saying, "This is the last time I will play dolls," an emphatic thought for a ten-year-old. Where did it come from--a ten-year-old realizing a defining moment in her life, knowing it is a "never coming back to" event? In that moment, on that spot, I aged. To never go back to relive something again, is that realization a sign of age or decay? Can I go back? Can I play with dolls again and become ten again? Can I play at age 50?

My boat is a playful place where I run to after a hard day of non-play. Play is a form of amusement and recreation. Recreation is "re" + "creation;" it means to create anew (Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary, 1990). Does play as recreation help to re-create a tired being? To recreate is to re-create. Sailing as recreating is a step toward creating anew the mid-life Being of women. Recreation also means to "recover from illness or restore" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 643). Sailing space becomes a place to recover from inauthentic technical ways. Our play at sea is therapeutic to the recovery of the soul.

Gadamer describes the play of games. "Play fulfills its role only if the player loses himself in play. It is an experience, a mode of being. To be in play is to be in that mode of being" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 102). I want to be in that losing-self mode of play.

“Play at Sea”

Playing at sea.
 Look at me.
 Recreating myself by losing myself.
 Like a ball in play,
 I go the seaway
 To another place.
 Playing at sea. (Schaefer, 2001)

The gain of play is what holds players in its spell. There is a desire to partake in the various mental attitudes. Play is self-presentation tied up in the goals of presenting something--the self (Gadamer, 1960/1989). The mechanical skills of sailing represent play for some. The intricacies of knowing and mastering the electronic equipment, diesel engines, and other operating systems on board can be a playground for the mechanically skilled. The science of boat design, the aerodynamics of sail trim and sailboat racing strategies are playful challenges for sailors. A sailboat becomes a playground for people who like to make things “go.”

“Happy Ship”

How do you make a happy ship,
 A ship of playfulness?
 Jump on board and join the game.
 Show your face,
 Forget your name.
 Play to win by losing you
 Let your Being show right through. (Schaefer, 2001)

Dream space. I am turning into myself to enter the belly of the beast, the bottom of the well, the world between reality and dreaming. I am ready to face life’s burdens from a new view found inside the physical. Aboriginal people consider the invisible medium between the elements as dreamtime, or what Westerners would call

the unconscious. Dreamtime is the creative but unseen realm from which conscious forms arise.

Dreamtime, the realm of dream-like happenings from whence the visible present is continually emerging, not just within the sea and land, but also in the invisible depth of the wind itself, in the thickness of the very medium that flows around us. It is the place where the invisible, unconscious potentials begin to become visible. (Abram, 1996, p. 227)

Can sailing be an activity that occurs within the mind's sea and wind world? Can it be an activity that becomes a vehicle for moving through dreamtime, moving into an unconscious state? Can the sailing life bring forward our unconscious potentials, potentials that can reshape life's burdens and use their tensions to create a wonderland?

Desired place. In moments of silence, I feel the warmth of my own Being. It is here in my chest, like a hug, a perfect moment. I rush forward on my "sea mobile" and I feel that warmth again. It is like the same unspeakable perfection realized as a child opening presents at Christmas, getting dog kisses, eating Sarah Lee cheesecake, getting hugs from Grandma, praise from father and smiles of approval from big brother. Now as a mid-life woman, I seek that warmth and need it desperately. How do I connect with my essence, my Being? Barriers created by the technical "expected and ordinary" ways of everyday life make the warmth seem unobtainable. Yet at sea, as I speed across the ocean being rocked with the rhythm of the earth, the luminescence of the "seen" shows on my face and the warmth returns to my chest. How do I retrieve, inhale and forever know that way of Being? I can not wait for

Christmas, dog kisses and cheesecake to experience that joy. As I grow older, I grow impatient and I want to feel that warmth all the time.

The journey through mid-life is a trip within. It is a time of listening to stillness with great attention as I try to connect with my soul. Sometimes when the stillness and warmth are unobtainable, I return to my immediate world seeking a “quick fix” with dog kisses, cheesecake, and praise. Women of the sea seek opportunities to find and prolong this warmth through a sense of place in the natural world. Surrounded by Nature, it is easier to enter and hold the soul. Connecting with Being can be a breeze for sea sisters.

I dig deep to understand my chosen life and its intended purpose of leaving the familiar behind. Steering my vessel, my body, through the uncharted waters of ageing’s physical and mental changes, I choose a way uncharted. I am a woman without children who feels she has raised a brood. My body in transition is less attractive: hair turning a dull brown, a disappearing waistline, a jowl, a hot flash, a missed cycle, impatience with stupid ideas, a quick temper, a quicker laugh, and an “I could care less attitude” about really important things like career, appearance, fancy cars and panty hose. These attributes describe who I am becoming housed in a space called my body. Why do I now look within? Why do I now seek another experience, one that lies in invisible places? What is the trigger for change?

We seek change when we lose ourselves. Arnold Gehlen tells us that when we lose our *Dasein*, our sense of Being, we feel like we have lost ourselves. “Man [sic] goes into himself (withdraws) and loses the world and he goes into the world and

loses himself” (Gehlen, as cited in Sanfranski, 1998, p. 160). We need a change to get reacquainted with the lost, reacquainted with our sense of place in the world.

A sense of place. Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) expresses the intimate relation of body and world. He tells us that like the heart of the world, the body keeps the visual alive for us by breathing life in to it. People of the sea reside in a soulful world place, a place of transcendental egos (Moran, 2000). In fact the word soul comes from Old High German text meaning, “...coming from or belonging to the sea. So related because the sea was supposed to be a stopping place of the soul before birth and after death” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 740). Women of mid-life seek this soulful place on a boat to experience their rebirth before death. They talk about it as a place for returning to relationships with their mate. There, surrounded by Nature, they reside in a space where intimacy comes naturally--where they see, hear, smell each other unencumbered by the neon lights of our contrived “natural” surroundings (O’Donohue, 1997).

Boat space. Buildings and land place dwellings are not for me. In my life, I have lived in 12 different houses, never finding one that fit. Like a shell too small or too big, I rejected dwelling places on the land. I seek space with ever changing views, views that show another horizon. I seek space that moves with me from shore to shore.

My body is affected by my boat space. My physical body changes to the boat’s demands. A low companionway, I bow my head as I pass under it. A rough sea, my muscles flex and strengthen to keep me from falling; I swing and sway with

the boat to keep my balance. I dance with the boat allowing the space to mold my physical body and define its posture. I conform to my space, thus creating a place for myself.

Casey (1993) says that built places are extensions of our bodies. They enlarge our embodiment to an entire life world of dwelling. We become intimate with our structure and the longer we reside in place, the more body-like the space seems to be. As we feel more “at home” in the dwelling place, it becomes recreated in our own body image.

The dwelling where we reside comes to exist in our image, but, we the resident, also take on certain of its properties. How we are, our bodily being, reflects how we reside in built places. Such traits as ‘reclusive’ or ‘expansive’ ‘sinuous’ or ‘straight’ can characterize our somatic selves as well as the houses we inhabit. (Casey, 1993, p. 120)

Does my dwelling place on the sea affect my bodily being in a way the land no longer satisfies? Do I need to float atop a skin of water to be the person I want to be?

“Boat Space”

I run to this place, my boat, the sea.
I fly from the land, the dirt and the noise.
I want this tension of peril and peace.
Do you seek such a place where you are?

Get out of my path to horizon.
Grab hold of my life ring and I will take you along.
Board my life raft--my place afloat,
where women find Being aboard a boat. (Schaefer, 2001)

Fellow sailors have named spaces on a ship to remind them that the ship has a human spirit. Often referred to in the feminine, a ship is imagined to be a female

being. Referring to this space and its place in the feminine, makes a ship a welcoming dwelling for women. It is a “she” space.

“A Woman is a Ship”

To a sailor, a ship is a woman because it holds and enfolds.
 To a ship, the sea is woman because it holds and enfolds.
 To the sea, the earth is woman because it holds and enfolds.
 To the earth, the great void is woman because it holds and enfolds.
 This is how the Great Mother is – how she holds within holding
 and how she holds with out holding. (Grigg, 1990, p. 59)

Places named on a boat are reminders of the human form. The front of the boat is called the bow, which is the body’s required action when entering the boat. The beds are called berths, which sounds like the word “birth,” an event that creates human life. The steering station is called a cockpit, obviously, a place where a man would stand. Casey (1993) reminds us, “In view of the intimate relationship between the human body and the dwellings in which it is placed and where it places itself, it is only to be expected that dwellings will themselves be likened to bodies” (p.118)

Casey (1993) suggests two relationships that exist between the human form and built places, like a ship. First, structures built actually resemble the human body and are symmetrical and proportioned like a human body. This is true of a boat whose life first takes form on the drawing board of a navel architect. Here each line is drawn like a human form to ensure a balanced distribution of weight so the boat rests squarely and upright on the water line. Displacement must be even along the entire line so neither the bow or stern or port or starboard quarters are submerged in an unequal fashion. She floats evenly so she can sail upright and dance across the water. The mast “head” is placed over the keel “foot” to ensure the center of effort is over

the lowest and heaviest part of the boat. The center of effort, the main sail, is the driving force. As the main sail fills, the boat is pushed forward. The mast must be tall enough to carry enough sail to move the boat's weight, but not too tall that it can not clear the bridges and other known hanging obstacles found on the waterways. Finally, like the human form, she must be pleasing to the eye. As she rests at anchor, the loving eye of the owner inspects the profile of her lines. The look of the sheer deck line that slightly dips toward the waterline in a graceful curve, speaks to the pedigree of the boat's design. To create a boat that is customized to meet the dwelling needs of the captain--an efficient sailing machine that is beautiful to behold-- is the goal of the maker. It is the creation of a perfect she.

Second, the relations between human form and the ship's structure must consider the proportions borrowed from the bodies within it. Beauty will result from the correspondence of the whole to the parts, of the parts amongst themselves and of these again to the whole. The structure may appear as an entire and complete body, wherein each member agrees with the others and all members are necessary for the accomplishment of the structure (Alberti, as cited in Casey, 1993). In other words, the structure exists because of the influence of the other within. The structure reflects the influence of their bodily being.

Thus, my beautiful boat results from its pleasing proportions coupled with the beings that reside within it. The structure as a whole is complete because the members, my mate and me, are necessary for the accomplishment of the boat. The

parts are unable to exist without the shell, and the shell is empty without its parts.

Symbiosis and codependency are celebrated in the creation of a beautiful whole.

The boat is our space marked by us. Hands shaped and formed this boat. Hands sail this boat. Our bodies wear on her like an abrasive stone creating the patina of lived surfaces. My boat has a rubbed spot on the fiddle surrounding the galley's countertop. It got there from my husband's foot. When he is seated at the navigation station and the boat is on a 30-degree heel to port, he puts his foot on the oiled wooden fiddle to steady himself. That spot is from him, of him. Even when I oil over the spot to try and blend the worn surface into the surrounding sheen, I cannot remove it. So I leave it, worn, as a marked place belonging of him. He and boat become one as he balances in its belly. My ship, my vehicle to horizon and beyond, is a home on the sea.

Casey's (1993) discussion about "dwelling as a wandering place versus dwelling as residing" (p. 114) must be reconsidered for people of the sea. He considers a wandering existence as being placeless, but this is not so. The sailor brings place with her. She lives in her home place and relocates in space. Yes, we meander from shore to shore, but we are oriented on the globe. Our movement is purposeful as our choice of view compels us to relocate our dwellings. We are implaced in a moving space, moving locations in an exploratory manner. Are we without home, homeless? No, we have space, orientation and community, all of which construct place.

Moving space. Complete with devices to enhance communication with the outside world, we stay connected with our sailing community and our families. We use cell and satellite telephones, ham radios and Email in our moving space. It is only physical distance that separates bodies, and the distance shortens or lengthens as the next horizon is approached. Conscious decisions to move to a horizon North, South, East or West bring family and friends physically closer or more distant. Always in motion, the crew is in constant locational flux from family members. What is the impact of changing the “near and far” orientation of bodies in space? The moving “closer to” and “farther from” family members causes separations measured in thousands of miles. The average circumnavigation will take a cruising family six years in their moving home. How does the constant physical reorientation to family and friends affect mid-life women? Why do we seek this fluctuation in proximity to those we love?

This is my place of Being, my sanctuary, my dwelling place, my home, my hearth, my boat. I access my moving space across a threshold so low that I must bow my head to enter. This continual head bobbing has forced a subliminal reverence for the space. Has this caused an over zealous point of view? Is my love of this space merely a product of repetitive motion? Am I brainwashed, or is my boat, truly, as the boat maker’s slogan says, “Your best friend during your worst day at sea.” I move across the boat’s threshold from a public to private space. This crossing over yields a feeling of expectancy. It is a space held open where the visible becomes invisible. It is where the hardened woman enters the womb, a place for rebirth into the world.

Entering My Question

We call it the sailing season. Like the seasons of the year, the trees know when to bud and when to wither. Like the migration of geese south, the body is triggered; it reacts and changes directions. Is this what happens to me this time each year? Am I, too, an instinctual creature who knows the change of season is near, adjusts to it and turns to the sea? I wonder about my choice of a seaward direction. Is meaning found if I unwrap this phenomenon by delving into the experiential tellings of others? I wonder about this, and in my wondering a question forms: **“What is the lived experience of mid-life women who have chosen the sea way as sailor?”**

Coming about, I change my direction--I turn to self for the answer. My mind hurries to catch up with the physical changes of my body. Physically, it is harder to run a mile, to sit up straight, to carry out the garbage, to raise the main sail. Mentally, I forget things, lock my keys in the car, forget to buy milk and forget my own birthday. I am housed in the flesh of an aging body over which I have no control. I feel deceived and betrayed by it.

Am I looking for a way out of it, or am I looking for a way into it? I turn to my body, knowing it, knowing myself in hopes of discovering who I am today and who I will be tomorrow. My turning is to me, to my soul, to my essence--to Being--to answer the questions of mid-life, for my life and others'. Through phenomenological inquiry, the reconsideration of meaning can occur for women who turn to sailing in mid-life.

Reconsidering Through the Sea Life

Women have chosen the sea over land as a choice of place that supports their Being. It is a place to reconsider relationships with husbands, family and friends. It is a place to reconsider the meaning of our life.

Women have been turning to the sea as early as the 1840s when women set off with their husbands on whaling ships. Few realize the numbers of women that chose this way of life over the land. One woman in particular, Mary Brewster, made up her mind to voyage with her husband despite numerous efforts by society to keep her on the land. She refused to conform and she refused to be separated from her husband. (Druett, 1992, p. 67)

Mary Brewster's decision to sail was unusual. Relatively few wives had gone a-whaling with their husbands. Only eight whaling voyages with the captain's wife about have been documented. Considering the length of the voyages and the savage state of the Pacific, it was a decision that took much courage. However Mary Brewster had good reason. She was devoted and obsessively in love with her husband. (Druett, 1992, p. 4)

Ann Carl, a contemporary, experienced offshore sailor, writes about the sailing community with whom she spent most of her life. She describes the life of long distance sailors as they travel the globe encountering each other again and again at various far flung places. Her descriptions about how sailors exchange information, aid, and the current news of their fellow adventurers illustrate for us the feeling and thoughts of sailors about their chosen life.

When dangers like stranding on reefs, fatal hull and rigging failures in a storm, being run-down by ships at night, fires, man overboard, critical illness far at sea, await them, what reason do the long distance sailing people give for choosing their lifestyle? Along our journey, we asked that question, and our answers are varied. You remember what many sailors told us, particularly the young or semi-young with small children that they had left their home and jobs and had gone to sea to 'reconsider my life.' (Carl, 1985, p. 158)

At some point in time, we are called to reconsider our way in the world, our path--our lives. The sea serves as a place for the reconsideration to occur. It is a place to contemplate and re-create self. In the spiraling hurricanes of our own making, we take a mid-life pause to skip stones on the water. Like we did as a child, we count the skips with each throw, happy to see we can still skip a stone after 50 years of “better things to do.”

Carl goes on to reflect,

Is it so strange that we are drawn again to the primordial seas of our origin? That we have a deep desire to shake off the noisy and frustrating impedimenta of modern life, and long to return to the elemental sea and sky, the call of the seabird, the timeless passage of the constellations along the ecliptic? (1985, p.161)

Seas are primordial soup. Speculated to be the origins from which human kind emerged, we as sailors return to the pot, to be renewed by the original broth. After a time, we emerge to the land rejuvenated, reinvented, recreated and never the same--no, never the same.

Heidegger (1953/1996) says that life keeps seeking itself in an ever new, looking--away, falling and crashing way. Our every day life, however, does not notice the falling. Routinely, we fall into the nothingness of our factual life and come up empty. Bewildered, we wonder if there is a point to our everyday frenzy. Does his voice echo Carl's to urge for us to consider another way?

Shells house Being. The primordial sea conjures up images of countless shells residing on the sea bed. “Only images can set the verbs into motion” (Bachelard, 1958/1994, p. 110). The image of a shell, housing a being that grows and emerges

from its hardened home, is ripe with metaphorical opportunities to understand the essence of Being within.

In Bachelard (1958/1994), Paul Valery describes a shell as “a form giving life, the mystery of slow continuous formation” (p. 106). Heidegger (1953/1996) writes about revealing and concealing the visible and invisible of an object, and objects are visibly pregnant with the invisible (D. Levin, 1999). The shell and the creature within are perfect symbols for our considering the invisible. These phenomenologists inspire us to explore the unseen. Considering the image of shells housing Being can help us do that.

“Invisible You”

Your secret side-your story,
 tell it to me and I behold your soul.
 Your story, your essence, unique to you
 Holding the truth, we all want to hear.
 I want to know your invisible concealment.
 Your hidden treasure unearthed with conversation.
 I want to hear your solutions, your thoughts--godlike.

The secret of your being is your Being.
 Your story reveals Being--like no other.
 Your conversations/questions tell us of life's essence.
 We mine those thoughts to construct a truth.
 Your truth, our truth, a path to eternity and enlightenment.

A shell houses a life form that conceals secrets. It is pregnant with life.
 Women of the sea are harbored in the womb of boats, their shells.
 In this quiet place they discover their Being.
 Emerging with voice they reveal the essence of life within.
 You only see a shell?
 It is a vessel teaming with Being. (Schaefer, 2001)

Women forming and reforming in mid-life are creatures within a vessel--
 creatures within a shell. It becomes our home in the water from where we grow and

venture into the outside. Yet, it stands as our fortress, our protection, our sanctuary from the day-to-day. Vulnerable and soft is the body of the sea creatures that live within the shell. Like the sea creature, the Paper Nautilus, we bring our shells with us as we travel upon the sea surface. The Paper Nautilus is referred to as the “little sailor.” This animal uses its shell like a boat to carry newly hatched young to the sea surface. There, she releases them into the world to populate the oceans (Melvin, 1973). The shell, our boat, becomes our place of rebirth. As our home, it cradles and harbors our ways to renewal.

...a creature that hides and withdraws into its shell preparing a way out. If we remain at the heart of the image under consideration, we have the impression that by staying in the motionless maze of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds of being. (Bachelard, 1958/1994, p. 111)

Temporal explosions and whirlwinds of being are words of power. Yes, within the shell we cook and stew as we wait to emerge powerful and significant. Mid-life renewal is a time of explosions and whirlwinds. It is a bursting forth while spiraling within. We dervishly spin--spin in our present space to another place--spin to our *Dasein*, Heidegger's (1953/1996) word for Being.

The whirling dervish is a whirlwind dance whose ritualistic purpose is to affect a mystic union between man and god (Bersky, 1991). It takes place in a room whose right side represents the known, tangible world (the technical) and the left is the unknown and invisible (the Being). The dance has three stages of progressive twirling. First, the dancers spin slowly to enact what it is like knowing God. Second, they spin a little faster to depict what it is like seeing God. Third, is when the

whirlwind occurs symbolizing the union with God. Whirling as in a “temporal explosion,” allows its participant to attain a form of ecstasy that leads to the soul’s bliss and full awareness of a divine being. It is this whirlwind of being that Bachelard suggests is possible for women at mid-life. Her shell is a place where the god-search begins.

Taken as a whole, with both its hard covering and its sentient organism, the shell, for the Ancients, was the symbol of the human being in its entirety, body and soul. In fact, ancient symbolics used the shell as a symbol for the human body, which encloses the soul in an outside envelope. (Charbonnedux-Lassay, as cited in Bachelard, 1958/1994, p. 116)

The body is the shell housing a soul. Is a boat the shell housing a female being? Is the female the soul of a boat? They say the body becomes lifeless when the soul has left, in the same way that the shell becomes incapable of moving when it is separated from the part that gives it life (Bachelard, 1958/1994). Does a being give life to a lifeless vessel? Is a boat without a woman lifeless?

Lovely shells, lively image- I am tempted to play with in my mind. Is this the symbol for another stage in relationship? Can we middle aged argonauts, when we outgrow our oyster bed, look forward to the freedom of the nautilus who has left its shell for the open sea? But what does the open sea hold for us? We can not believe that the second half of life promises “fair” weather and favorable winds. What Golden Fleece is there for the middle aged? (Lindbergh, 1955, p. 86)

The Wentle trap is a precious shell. Wentle is a Dutch word meaning a winding staircase. Staircase shells are “high spired with many rounded whorls gradually decreasing in size” (Low, 1961, p. 31). Winding and spiraling in an endless rotation upon itself, the Wentle trap speaks of evolving being, moving, changing, reaching outward, and yet grounded in its starting point. This metaphysical movement

might be likened to a woman in transition reforming her self over and over again, on a journey up a spiraling staircase leading to infinity.

Sailing women's shells are different from those of women of the land.

“Work-a-Day-Woman”

The look of a work-a-day-woman,
with your artificial shell,
hard painted nails, colored strands of hair.
Made up with flesh colored facial barriers covering the self.
Uniformed/suited body no part of flesh exposed except for legs encapsulated in
nylon mesh covering the scars of torn skin.
The visible covering the Being.

The look of a work-a-day sailor.
Hair in the breeze so the air skims the scalp.
Face to the sun.
Shorts and loose fitting T-shirts, skin exposed.
Closer to the invisible but still layered.

Sailors with layers to uncover. Layers that are unseen.
Being within, beyond our reach,
Yet, closer than for the work-a-day woman.
One step closer to the Being.

Take off those outer layers.
Put the top down, let the wind in.
Let Nature color hair and face.
Expose the you behind the patina of technical lives. (Schaefer, 2001)

Many women turn to the sea environment and sailing experience in mid-life. Why would someone choose sailing as a way of living out her later decades? How is life on a boat at sea different from life in a house on the land?

Our patina, often hard and rough from the routine of daily life, is like the outer covering of a shell. What happens when we turn the shell gently over and look inside that rough exterior? A smooth colorful surface is presented as it winds down into the

hollow of the object. We are vulnerable when we are on our backs, exposing our hidden truths. In the world of the sea the exposure is required, for only there will the beauty be found. Does our vulnerability at sea lead us to our beautiful ways? Can we learn from the shell and let our true colors show and be beautiful?

The play of the waves, the to and fro movement, being (Being) rocked like a baby in a cradle are life giving energies on a ship. The power of repetitive motion can erode shells and hard edges. Can that repetition erode my edges? Can play remove my edges and make me round and smooth again like a young woman? Can it remove the edges of 50 years of technical living? Can play remove my sharp tongue and make it sing melodies and playful rhymes? I seek the rocking, the motion – the play of the waves.

Am I alone with my sharp edges and technical ways? Many live and exist in space as I do. Many are waiting for their “Godot” (Beckett, 1954). We wait and wait for redemption, and, while we wait, what do we do with our selves? What we do with the wait matters. What we do with each second changes the next second. The choice of a single second affects all those that follow. Mid-life becomes our resting point--the time to review, rebound, reconsider, reinvent, relive and recreate. So we can go forward and view, bound, consider, invent, live and create. Sailing on the sea is a perfect place for this to occur. For me, it is the only place.

Vertical and horizontal views. It is 5 AM and we are standing on deck to watch a rare comet shower that will not occur again until 2099. I stand and peer into the sky and watch flashes of light skid across the blackness. It reminds me of place as

described by Casey (1993) in his interpretation of Aristotle's work, Physics. He says that our place is "...in regions above and below an imaginary vertical axis extending between earth and heaven" (p. 76). On deck we are eight feet above the earth, 8 feet along the axis heading toward heaven. Does being on a boat suggest an elevated position nearly three meters closer to heaven?

My blue world is sky and sea of the same color. The horizon slices across it like a line with edges turned downward. The horizon floats in the blueness as I approach. The horizon disappears when I sink into a "trough"-- the place between waves. My motion up and down in relation to my vertical space changes my horizontal view. I see both near and far places all in one glance as my eyes reach hungrily toward the finish line. One minute I see it and the next it is gone. Life's horizons/goals are like that--one minute seen and the next illusive. Disoriented when the horizon disappears, we continually search for it to reappear. As long as sailors have horizon, they have a sense of place. There would be no place to sail to without horizon, and every sail reveals new ones. The "horizon is a boundary not a limit" (Casey, 1993, p. 61). It is an always moving away place. It defines where we go next.

Sailors have a far away look in their eyes. Far away is a place toward horizon. It is not to the near places but toward far horizons that we venture. Sailors are bold and they go toward the boundary. A horizon is a boundary defined, not to limit us but to suggest a place of "passage through" as we venture toward it. Is the passage toward horizon measurable, and if so, how do we know we have arrived? As we approach our horizon, it recedes unreachable by our human form. It becomes the infinite

unobtainable goal of sailors who constantly seek another one. It becomes a place of searching, a place of transformation.

“Horizon” means “her” + “I” + “zone.” Is horizon the zone where mid-life woman sailors discover the “I”--the place we sail toward in search of unreachable gifts not found in technical living? Is horizon the threshold we seek to cross? We run toward what it represents, knowing we may never fully reach it. As we sail forward toward horizon, do we step further away from a technical way of being?

I am circling the globe one day at a time, approaching a visual, horizontal boundary that will not limit me, but it prevents the passage of my human form. Transcendence means “climb over or beyond or surmount” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 826) the body. So, to reach that boundary, I must transcend it. The body defines my “place” on the globe, but can it also limit it? I seek a way to climb over and go beyond the body to realize transcendence. My physical form stops me from crossing to a visualized place called horizon.

I will transcend the physical with my mind and enter a place of enlightenment. Seeking a knowing way to reveal life’s meaning is the first step to an enlightened state. Knowing ways come from peeling back layers of daily lived experiences and reflecting on their meaning. Appreciation of the preconceived moment surrounding the lived experience is meaning, the seed of enlightenment. It is through meaning that we transcend merely being physically placed in the world. Thus, I return to my question in an endeavor to make meaning of my lived ways. I ask, **“What is the lived**

experience of mid-life women who have chosen the sea way as sailor?” This question heralds the beginning of my journey.

Sunset Years

A burley sailor, Artie English, once said to me, “I know why women go to sea. They go because on a boat everything is known. When they are on a boat they can be all they want to be.” What is, “All I want to be”? How do we make happen the “all” of our desires? Is “all” something that exists only in our tangible world, or does it also exist in our missing reality, part of our other side?

The sail calls you to it, to experience it, to use it to explore your other side, your dreamtime side, your Being. Mid-life’s sunset years is the time chosen by some to uncover Being. Like waves eroding the beach, pulling grains of sand away, leaving only water, our mid-life time can gently expose the unseen. As we stare at the watery surface of our new situation, we prepare to journey to a “somewhere between realities” place located where the land used to be. Like Argonauts, we launch our shell full of life and venture out to sea.

“Argonauts”

Out of a life seeming suddenly
overpolled, overtollled, over-overseen
polluted, computerized, too populated
tinny, noisy and pornographic
greedy, goal-less and threatening holocaust
certain renegades set forth.

Out of this stifling tedious contest
into a new and unknown maelstrom
into unleashed winds and building waves
on a shifting, indifferent, uncaring sea

in a fragile sail-powered cockleshell
these modern argonauts risk all.

Out upon the wild and open sea
bows pointed to strange lands, strange harbors
encountering currents unforeseen, uncharted reefs
encountering calms, beating sun and rainbows
encountering others, time and time again, around the globe
fellow searchers, sailing together.

Out upon the salty, far-off, lonely highways
out of reach of foreboding newscast
out of touch with changing mores and fashions
the absolute, utter reality looks back
stares silently, unflinchingly, unanswering
and still these sailormen keep on-
looking for the safe harbor of golden sunset
looking for the company of like men. (Carl, 1985, introduction)

Looking for the company of like beings in mid-life, we venture into the world at a
time in our lives when authenticity is sought. Like starving infants, we seek authentic
nourishment and we return to our natural environment to find it.

I turned to the sea, to Nature, because I can see Being in the still water.
I search for myself transformed in Nature.
This image is the truth of me.

Reflections in the water, seeing back.
The concealed becomes revealed.
The visible body is reflected as the invisible self-looking back.
Can that be Being I see?

Will the reflection speak?
Will its voice bring forward the voices of other women?
Will conversations reveal their Being, like a reflection in the sea?
Like a reflection of me?

All unique, we share common threads that reveal,
Will we reflect each other and expose the concealed?
Sisters of the sea, our essences sing as we share our stories.
Is that our Being that rings?

I want to be changed, moved, transformed.
 Change me; change me, never to be the same.
 I walk in the open field my arms wide, my chest raised my throat exposed,
 and I surrender to life's transforming forces. (Schaefer, 2001)

We must allow ourselves to be forever changed by life's events. We must be open to life's ebbs and flows, to permit Nature's energy to flow and pass through us and refresh our spirits and souls. Only through the exposure to Nature and lived experiences will we see the light and luminescence promised in our sunset years. Only through open vulnerability will we shift our stance and measure our core. Enlightened women of mid-life know the power of change; we measure it with our bodies. Our physical clock and our intuitive sense warn us of the changes that await us in the next decade; we must learn ways to join with that power.

Storms at Sea

Living openly with the tensions of change creates opportunities for transformation. The way of this transformation starts deep within us like a force building, like a storm at sea. The lessons learned from the tensions of life-changing storms may be difficult, the uncertainty uncomfortable and for some, like me, fearful. How we choose to interact with our environment's life-changing ways will forever transform us.

“My Storm”

My storm begins. It starts at the place death occurs, here over my heart.
 The scream begins, I can't stop it. I am afraid.
 The scream begins an empty hollow sound filled with the sounds of lost souls.
 I want to take it back, but how? I too am a soul lost.

I will live openly, as if each moment is forever and each day my last.
 I will stay in the moment the here and the now.

I will listen and focus on each You.
I will cross the line of the physical to spiritual and reach back to take you
along. Come, sail with me. (Schaefer, 2001)

The storm is part of the lived. I live in its tension, which repeats itself daily.

Tensions examined become opportunities to learn, to learn about Being. Tension varies and mutates; it is different each day. Unique circumstances change its face. Oh, to have the wisdom to celebrate tension as a force that transforms. If we flow with its currents and participate in its eddies, we can make tension an illuminating opportunity. It can be more than just the source of a painful day; it can make me a wise old owl.

Examining our tension, we see the sharp edges of the real cutting through our spirit. At what point does the physical succumb to the tensions of the spirit? Which breath will collapse us into our own physicalness and stop us in our tracks? The collapse of the physical is called disease. “Dis” + “ease” means without ease or filled with tension.

Levinas (1987) believes that the phenomenon of tension, depicted as suffering, is about giving up on one’s mastery and accepting that the possible is no longer possible for the one alone. In suffering with these tensions, we seek the other without domination of the other. Does suffering the tensions of life, build relationships with the other? Is a way of grappling with tensions to build relationships with others? Is mid-life transcendence really about relationship building?

How do sailors handle the tension of facing severe weather on a boat at sea?
Do they just face the tensions and learn ways to sensitize themselves to

uncontrollable events, or do they seek the companionship of others to get them through it?

“The Storm”

The storm is brewing; I feel it coming.
 I feel the storm coming. Do you?
 It is cook’n, hanging pregnant in the air ready to drop its devils upon us.
 Vulnerable beneath it, to be forever changed by it,
 moved in unexpected directions.
 It looms in the distance on the timeless horizon,
 not moved by my clock but rather its own.

It is raining over you right now.
 I hear the anxiety of your lived experience,
 I ache and weep with you.
 It will come my way too, I am afraid.
 Later we will share our stories in conversation.
 The storm unites us. The tension bonds us.
 We will become one with the other,
 a community of wet sailors. (Schaefer, 2001)

Moran (2000) recounts Sartre’s claim that human existence consists of moments of anxiety, vertigo and nausea. He reminds us that us there is no blue print for human existence to make life meaningful. We face up to a formless world that makes us dizzy and disoriented in our existence. A state of anxiety and fogginess exists as part of being in the world.

“Foggy Days”

I am sailing in and out of the fog.
 In and out of a coma.
 Sometimes clear and other times foggy, confused, falling back.

In my coma falling deeper.
 Is this a threshold to another way?
 The escape route from normalcy?

I am trying to gain my footing as I float above the seabed.
 The water is over my head; I can't touch the bottom.
 I reach with my foot and still can't touch.
 "Help I can't touch."
 Oh, wait. I feel it.
 No, it is gone again.

One moment so clear on firm ground,
 the next floating away.
 Away in the fog.

Which is the way to Being?
 Floating or grounded?
 Foggy or clear thinking? (Schaefer, 2001)

If I placed a want ad in the personal section of the newspaper, it would read like this: *Mid-life, confused woman seeks help with Being. Occasional lapses of clarity and being on firm ground are her only flaws. Has a fear of fogginess and floating for too long because she does not understand that state. Seeks fellow floaters to prolong the experience until she figures it out. Waiting for the tide to recede.*

I do not know who I am anymore. I go deep into myself and explore meaning, yet, become more and more dissatisfied with what I see in my life and in my surroundings. Perhaps I am transcending, but it feels like sinking. Family and friends no longer recognize my ways. My hand extended, I seek others.

Lessons of the Sea

I write my way to transcendence, yet the goal recedes from my reach. How does that happen? To what do I surrender that keeps the goal from me? Do I surrender to normal expected behavior because it is easier and familiar? Do I "sell out" my eccentric ways to follow the normal, expected ways and remain empty?

There is tension in the pursuit of the non-normal sailing life. Plessner describes the non-normal eccentric as someone from a special organic environment into which he/she is wholly integrated. This person is open to the world, living “from his [sic] middle into his middle” (Plessner, as cited in Sanfranski, 1998, p. 288), a creature that keeps distances, bears the heavy burden of self and eccentric position, out of which arise delicate situations. The eccentric seeks a place for self and establishes connections, but does not become totally absorbed in them, cutting through the connections by experiencing self from within--a reflexive creature (Plessner, as cited in Sanfranski, 1998).

Gehlen deepens this look at the inward world of eccentric, reflexive creatures.

Such inwardness as a rule is too weak to bear his own world, but it is strong enough to let him perceive the necessary objectivization and institutionalization of his social world as an imposition and untruth. (Gehlen, as cited in Sanfranski, 1998, p. 160)

Life seems like an untruth and becomes objectified, burdensome, when our view of the inward world, Being, is weak. We peek at the possible, but until we become stronger eccentric beings, we must be satisfied with our brief perception of another way.

I am not yet strong enough to make the journey. My fear of the unknown and preference to avoid tensions prevents my passage. Anticipation of discomfort and unsettledness is my block. I seek the normal because it is easier, but it feels like a trap. Is the sea a place to escape objectification and institutionalization? No, the sea is a place of tension. It is a training ground to learn how to live in a tension filled world

with the help of others. It is a place for breaking free of old defenses by embracing tensions and “seeing your way through” with the help of friends.

I live near the shore, and with the start of each day, I am pulled away inland to job and responsibility. How can I find the freedom of sea life on the land? How can the lessons of the sea help in my transformation through my sunset years on the land?

Boat lessons. There are common lessons all sailors learn from spending time at sea. First, we learn how to give ourselves over to the motion of un-firm ground. Second, we learn to stay grounded in the present; it makes the motion and unease less frightening. Third, we learn the difference between the tensions created by real versus imagined danger. Recognizing real danger is one of the most important lessons of the sea. Bode describes it clearly:

I had been squandering a tremendous amount of energy fretting about a future that wasn't there... I had to guard against reacting too soon, because the vision of disaster that rose so vividly in my mind might turn out to be nothing more than an unfounded fear...although I didn't know it at the time, I was taking my first tentative steps toward becoming a master not so much of my boat or of myself but of reality... (1993, p. 88)

Fourth, we learn to be wise and watch for opportunities for growth, opportunities most often presented through relations with others.

Our tensions are like storms brewing, but sailors know to wait for the “weather window.” It is, then, that the environment is in agreement with their plans to fly. The “weather window” is the moment of opportunity when the tensions of the atmosphere lessen for awhile, and the window opens for our escape to sea. Our living “weather windows” are present when the storms of life are shared with others, storms represented by unrest with home, family, health or work. Each element creates its

own hurricane depending on the day. It is, then, that I and my “other” talk it out, wait it out and ride out the motion. Then, we fly away, each of us illuminated by that shared moment.

Storm lessons. The storms begin with a light, yet building, wind that hits you full force. You stand firm your ground, but the wind is strong and it blows you back. You cover yourself with a coat and hat, but the wind blows your hat off. Here comes the rain, and it blinds you with its force, like needles on your skin. You cry in pain. You wale for its release. You wait, and as your voice is heard, the storm passes; it always does.

Another storm is weathered, and out comes the sun. You rest, dry and relax yourself. Your “weather window,” the moment of your transcendence, has arrived. Armed with new knowledge, support and love, you prepare for the next storm. Is this the plight of mid-life women, always preparing for the next storm? Are we always readying ourselves for the onslaught of expected tensions, getting stronger and stronger with each encounter? Will the storm come from the North, a family illness, or will it come from the South, a lost pet? Will it appear quietly from the West, a lump in your breast, or will it blow full force from the East, rediscovering the love of your life? Not all tension is bad, but all tension is unsettling. Does sailing a boat at sea show us new ways to weather the storms? How does weathering storms lead to our transcendence as women in mid-life? I wonder about these lived ways at sea, and in my wondering my question reforms: **“What is the lived experience of mid-life**

women who have chosen the sea way as sailor?” What meaning waits to be revealed by exploring that question?

Phenomenology--My Considered Way to Meaning

Phenomenological methodology is the scholarly way I have chosen to grasp the meaning of my world. It is a hermeneutic approach that unearths meaning from the day to day ways of life, so often overlooked and underappreciated. It places value on the simple ways of living that we take for granted. It expands our consciousness by giving our mind's eye a gentle view into the essence of life. The purpose of phenomenology is to study meaning by acquiring a deeper knowledge about experiences that occur everyday (van Manen, 1990).

Can there be any other way to study my phenomenon, women turning to the sea way at mid-life? Not for me, because phenomenology's way appreciates the special and sacred ways of the common that constitutes the way of being in the world. I require that appreciation, for I seek meaning from the common ways of life. At mid-life women are less interested in the exceptional episode of spectacular events. They are more introspective and choose to reflect on the observed moments of life that are so fleeting. We face our own mortality and we value the moments of dailyness (Rountree, 1993).

Only through phenomenological methodology can we capture the meaning and essence of our own and others' lived ways. Phenomenological methodology explores the experiences and thoughts of the Other in a commingling way with our own. We interact, all of us as participants in a common question. It is a question for

me as well as for my community, and my encouraged participation in it compels my turning toward this methodology.

Van Manen (1990) suggests six actions to follow when undertaking a phenomenological study. Details on their implementation will be outlined in Chapter Three. For now, it is enough to mention what the six actions are and where they can be found in this text.

- (1) “Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world” (van Manen, 1990, p. 30) has been addressed in Chapter One, “Turning to the Phenomenon of Sailing” and in Chapter Two, “A Search for Soul.” In these chapters, I describe in depth how I came to my phenomenon and why.
- (2) “The methodology for investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it” (p. 30) is described in Chapter Three, “Methodological Grounding.” Here, I detail the phenomenological methodology that I use to investigate the lived experience.
- (3) “Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon” (p. 30) is the work of Chapters Four and Five. Descriptions of conversations about lived experiences are turned into themes that present themselves in these chapters.
- (4) “Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting” (p. 30) is the ongoing work throughout the study. An exploration of the phenomenon through this way of writing is

provided in Chapter Two, “A Search for Soul,” and continues in the thematizing process.

- (5) “Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon” (p. 31) is the focus of Chapter Six, where the insights gained are turned into recommendations that can be used to assist women in their middle years.
- (6) “Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole” (p. 31) is the back and forth process that makes up the way of phenomenological methodology, which is the work of the hermeneutic circle.

Having considered the whole of my scholarly undertaking in the outline above, it is now time to turn to the parts of its unearthing ways. I continue my journey in Chapter Two to deepen my understanding of the phenomenon, women turning to the sea way at mid-life. I follow my question as a guide to the soulful ways ahead: **“What is the lived experience of mid-life women who have chosen the sea way as sailor?”**

CHAPTER TWO: A SEARCH FOR SOUL

Sailing, a Means of Soul Searching

We seek a place called “soul,” as we undertake our mid-life journey. The word “soul” means the spiritual and emotional part of a person. It also means coming from or belonging to the sea. It is so related, because the sea was the stopping place of the soul before birth and after death. In Old English language, soul has a nautical reference, and it refers to persons aboard ships, as in “every living soul aboard ship” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 740). Why do we search for the spiritual and emotional parts of our being at mid-life? Perhaps, to go forward to the second half of lived time, we must wander inside and behind ourselves and ask the questions: “Who am I”? “Why am I alive”? “What is next”? Women at their mid-life point reach an impasse requiring reflection and soul searching. How do mere mortals explore the untouchable soul? Metaphorical descriptions help us understand the soul search through images of daily life. In this case, conversations about the sailing life become a vehicle for understanding the tasks of women’s mid-life journey.

Story telling and experiences relived are vehicles for learning. “Our species thinks in metaphor and learns through stories” (Bateson, 1994, p. 11). A woman, whose choice of life style at mid-life is to live on a boat, is not only committing a symbolic act that serves as a metaphor for a journey within, she is making a real life-choice, the embodiment of a metaphor from which stories emerge and learning ensues. A lived metaphor, when experienced to the fullest, creates for the participants different vantage points to explore relationships, their place in Nature, their purpose

for being and their soul's longings. Sailing on a voyage at sea is not an escape mechanism; it is a vehicle for self-exploration for those who choose to make it so. For some, it becomes a transcending "grail search;" for others it is just another "boat ride."

"Ithaka"

As you set out for Ithaka
 Hope the voyage is a long one,
 Full of adventure, full of discovery.
 Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
 Angry Poseidon - don't be afraid of them.
 You'll never find things like that on your way
 As long as you keep your thoughts raised high.
 As long as a rare excitement
 Stirs your spirit and your body.
 Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
 Wild Poseidon – you won't encounter them
 Unless you bring them along inside your soul,
 Unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope the voyage is a long one.
 May there be many a summer morning when,
 With what pleasure, what joy,
 you come into harbors seen for the first time;
 May you stop at Phoenician trading stations
 To buy fine things,
 Mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
 Sensual perfume of every kind –
 As many sensual perfumes as you can;
 And may you visit many Egyptian cities
 to gather stories of knowledge from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
 Arriving there is what you are destined for.
 But do not hurry the journey at all.
 Better if it lasts for years,
 So you are old by the time you reach the island,
 Wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
 not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you would not have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become so full of experience,
You will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.
(Cavafy, 1972, pp. 147-148)

Cavafy suggests, that in order to participate in all that the journey teaches, we must keep our spirits high, allow rare excitement to stir us and keep our souls free of the angry and wild Poseidon. Sailors use a term, “the righting moment” to describe that feeling. The “righting moment” is the point at which a boat returns to an upright position in the water after being on an angle or “heel.” When sailing, a boat is heeling to one side or the other as it makes its way through the water. When it stops heeling, it returns to its “righting moment.” The weight of its leaded keel causes the boat to return to an upright state. While sailing our body through life, do we “heel” ourselves as we try to get to our upright position? For women at sea, the “righting moment” is their time of arrival when learning occurs and transcendence is possible.

Like a boat at sea, women move through their days on land heeled on an angle, trying to find balance. Events of family life and work knock us down and bend us over. We feel out of control. Like a boat under sail, we struggle to right ourselves and return to a normal stance. We seek a center of balance with just the right amount of tension to facilitate learning and self-discovery. Seeking Ithaka is a purposeful journey, as Cavafy suggests above, to become “wise ...so full of experience.” The journey to Ithaka becomes a way to right ourselves; it becomes a way to the soul.

This chapter is about the search for our Ithakas, an underestimated journey that takes place during mid-life. The journey is about soul searching that is revealed through episodic descriptions of the sailing life. Sailing, thus, becomes a means to explore our search for Ithaka--our search for soul.

Soul Healing--Getting “There”

At mid-life, I awake each day feeling the tensions of the future. I see frustration, suffering, rough seas and painful changes awaiting me. We work long and hard to achieve a “tension free” mid-life; yet, I am learning that cannot be so. Tension and pain are the way to the soul, the way to transcendence along the path I have chosen. Do women turn to the sea because the ever present tensions are managed in a more primordial and basic way? Survival skills and activities of daily living construct a sailor’s day to day tensions. Life is intense but simpler. This is our training ground for new approaches to the major issues of the land that inevitably follow us to sea. The major issues of health and family cannot be avoided, nor would we want to avoid them. These are the struggles of all women, and these are the struggles that will lead us to soulfulness Moore (1992) enlightens us about our search for a soul -filled life that comes from cultivating ourselves.

The soul unfolds into the vast creation we call character or personality with a history, a community, a language and a unique mythology...the aim of soul work, therefore, is not adjustment to accepted norms or to images of statistical healing individuals. Rather, the goal is a richly elaborate life connected to society and nature, woven into the culture of family, nation and globe. (Moore, 1992, p. xviii)

The tensions of life develop our souls as mid-life women. The power of the soul comes from living close to the heart--experiencing failures, depressions and

losses of the day. Soul appears in the gaps and holes of experience, and it is in the gaps and spaces of daily living that we find the courage to continue. This soul work is our path to transcendence of Being. Getting comfortable with tension, anxiety and change is the work of mid-life. At age 50, I pause to consider where I am on this journey.

The soul cries out at mid-life. Is that why we turn to the sea? It calls us to examine its tensions rooted in family history. Moore (1992) claims that the cure for the soul lies in revisiting family stories. Does the physical distancing from family, caused by the cruising life, encourage women to reconsider family? Do sea people come to terms with this soul work because of constant departures, distancing and reapproaching with family? The movement of “going away from” and “returning back to” causes a lengthening and shortening of our family ties. Like a boat on a “spring line,” we pull to and fro toward the land. We pull to and fro from those we love.

Family and Family Stories--the Soul's Foundation

I am afraid to scrutinize this family of mine. Why do it? It is unsettling, but there is no soul cure without this examination (Moore, 1992). It is not a therapeutic analytic examination we seek, but rather a caring revealing of the lived way of the family. Exploring family stories and reflecting on the funny as well as the tragic times, we remember our past. With each memory and thought we put to rest the unsaid. Giving recognition to events is an act of putting them to rest. We cannot fix or change the past, but we can look it in the eye like the storm.

We cannot change the weather when the storm appears, but we can look at it from a distance, shorten sails, prepare our boat, move toward it, bear its brunt and let it carry us to blue lagoons. Yes, life on a boat can prepare mid-life women for soul searching and soul healing. Lencek and Bosker in, Sail Away: Stories of Escaping to Sea, talk about how voyaging leads to soul discovery.

Only at sea, where we abandon the assumptions and routines to which we cling as long as we walk on stable ground, do we begin to see lucidity into our innermost depths. Sailors often talk about the way the sea alters their sense of time, their diurnal rhythms, the texture of their self-awareness. Under the spell of solitude and the erratic pace of weather, the soul unfurls like a sail and lets the wind carry it where it will. (Lencek & Bosker, 2001, p. xii)

Is life on the sea with all that is learned and experienced a way to reach our soul? Moore believes the way to the soul is through family memory. “We can recover our soul by reflecting deeply on the soul events that have taken place in the crucible of the family” (Moore, 1992, p. 26), the place where our soul is born. Will time spent telling family stories at sea help mid-life women’s soul search?

Moore (1992) describes a biblical Adam said to be formed out of mud from the earth. We, then, are children of mud and slime. Our family origins are not pure and clean. Families are soiled from the start. He says that if we do not come to accept this notion, we will live life with hygienic notions of what the family should be. “The sentimental image of family that we present publicly is a defense against the pain of proclaiming the family for what it is, a sometimes comforting sometimes devastating house of life and memory” (Moore, 1992, p. 27). Moore suggests it does not matter whether one’s family life was happy and supportive, or abusive and neglected. He does not forgive nor ignore the abuses of childhood, but states that families are filled

with complexity, failures and weaknesses. The pain found in families can become a source of wisdom and transformation for its members. Accepting and acknowledging the family's shadows and failures to meet our expectations, forces us to face the mystery of family that resists moralism and sentimentality. "We are taken back to the mud of Adam where principle gives way to life in all its beauty and horror" (Moore, 1992, p. 27).

The family is a nest from which our soul is born, nurtured and released into life. Family life is experienced on two levels: the façade of happiness and normalcy, and the behind the scenes reality of craziness and abuse. Some people want to believe the bliss of normalcy and maintain the secrecy of the shadowy side. Others wish they had been born to another family other than their own. Recovery of the soul begins when we take to heart our family fate and find in that raw material the beginning for our own soul work (Moore, 1992).

Care of the soul in route to transcendence is not about understanding, psychoanalyzing or figuring out and making better the family shadows. Rather, it "resuscitates images of family life as an exercise in the enrichment of identity" (Moore, 1992, p. 29).

"Mirror Mirror"

Mirror, mirror on the wall who am I really?
I paint and color my face and hair to look like another.
I diet and exercise to look different from my mother.
At age 50, her spitting image. (Schaefer, 2001)

“The avoidance of parental influence is a sure way to become a carbon copy--the return of the repressed” (Moore, 1992, p. 30). Generally, when we try not to be like a parent, we tend to reject all of their traits. We reject the good and bad in our total avoidance of person. Whether we like it or not, however, the parent’s spirit lies within each of us, and it is from this spirit that our soul is formed. The family is a balance between what we fear and what we need. Renewed entry into the family realm will allow one to recapture the needed elements. Trying to embrace that which was denied through imagining, causes a shift in the balance that makes a significant difference (Moore, 1992).

The power of imagining how our family should be sets the family relationship up for failure. Instead, we should imagine the family as it is through family stories. This imagining can unleash some of the soul that has been bound up in resentment and rigidity. We pass through the fixed views and reconnect with family members in different ways. The players are the same; what has changed is our more open and less self-protective approach.

Stories told. As we listen to the stories of women at sea, themes of a family saga present themselves. The autobiographical text of mid-life women is constructed by their looking backward into past, lived ways. It provides a deconstructed text of a lived experience remembered. What is the relationship between living and telling? Perhaps living is current perception, and telling gives voice to the perception of the past. These stories are opportunities for meaning making. Grumet reminds us, that education is a person’s dialogue with the world about her experience in the world

(1992). Thus, a woman's story is an opportunity to hear her thoughts, and it is from this telling that the meaning of mid-life women's choice of the sea way can be mined. Autobiographical stories are unique voices telling a unique story. Voicing the unique with another, gives opportunity for comparison and reflection of important shared lived ways.

Myths created. Family history can also be thought of as the making of one's mythology as we accept perspective from the teller's skewed view. A myth is created from remembering, imagining, and reimagining. Carse (1993) explains that myths we create or relate to are powerful feelings of who we are. Meaning can be mined from our relations and perception to chosen myths. "By listening to the resonance of a myth, we hear our own lives resounding in it. The active study of myth is the active study of the narration of our own lives" (Carse, p. 228). The power to reimagine our families in a mythical telling is an exercise we can take to sea as we do our soul work. Fellow sailors listen to our myths as they accept and bear witness to the origins of our soul. By stripping away the facade of the land, the sea reveals the "raw material" from which we are made.

Phenomenology is an exploration of lived experience from the perspective of each participant in conversation. Their stories, themes, mythology and sagas create a pattern of existing in the world. Commonality in imagining creates truth in the repetitive nature of the remembered and valued aspects of life. From this, truth is formulated for us to embrace and apply toward the transformation of the self.

Remembering family stories or constructing myths can be the starting place for mid-life women to begin their journey to meaning. Revealing the lived and experienced through story is a hermeneutic pursuit enabled through phenomenological methodology. Conversations and storytelling paint a picture of human experience with all its complexities. Exposing the stories, for all to see, is a freeing experience for the teller. Voicing the remembered ways puts them to rest. The rested mind is, then, free to be all that is possible. These stories of the soul are unfoldings from which we all can hear and learn. These are the tales shared among crew.

Do sailing women sharing family stories reap a double benefit? If we believe soul work occurs just by living the maritime life, and we couple that work with the soul healing power of telling family stories, a powerful transcending force is unleashed. The sailing life simplifies daily tasks. Our work becomes the tasks of daily living. Stripped away to the bone, life is simple, predictable, manageable and freeing. Relationships built upon common tasks and life styles bond the community of sailors. Women share stories and thoughts with each other. The camaraderie of kindred souls serves as your family when you are half way round the world. We come to learn that families and communities enable survival, some of us learning that lesson for the first time.

Deep Play--The Way to the Soul

So let us consider life as a game we play. The prize at the end of the game is knowing deeper. Deep play = deep knowing. I play to know, and I know to play. Is

sailing play? Ocean sailing is a paradox; it is neither work nor play. Cruising between oceans is hard play--it is something in between. Is sailing that in-between place we seek--a place of meaning and being? Sailing is Being-centered work focused on self and soul. Sailing is a state of mind. Sailing is a way to get me "there."

Play is between the ears. Play is the electrical place that triggers the grin. Do we learn when we play? Self-knowledge and internal wisdom gained by applied knowing comes as a result of play. Do we play when we learn? Learning occurs in places we choose, doing activities we enjoy. Yes, with play we learn. Each minute we are alive, the input of data and stimulation to our mind creates a change at the cellular level. Simply by existing, we learn; so, play is without a doubt a time of learning. Sailing is play gone deep. "At the heart of deep play is a form of meditation favored by westerners, people who tend to prefer bustle to inertia and prefer to meditate in motion" (Ackerman, 1999, p. 194). The meditation of the sea comes from the rhythmic motion of the boat in the waves. The repetition clears the mind of distractions; we withdraw from the world in a state of alert relaxation. There is mental cleansing that opens us to new knowledge. We self-hypnotize ourselves, and with our senses heightened enter into the "zone," "the flow," the cocoon of consciousness; here we are detached from ordinary life (Ackerman, 1999, p. 194). We do not stay in the zone because it is too exhausting, but we pass through it. The experience "orders our energies by closing off the world's drudgery and confusion and invokes our spiritual depths like a work of art or monastic discipline" (Ackerman, 1999, p. 195).

In this state of alert relaxation, we ask, is the boat a playground or workplace? Just like in a game or a place of work, we set goals and limits when we sail. The number of miles to a destination at a required speed represents the goal we seek in order to win at play. As in a game, we set up ordeals to overcome, such as, night watches and weeklong passages. We anticipate pain and discomfort, and we overlook them. Why do we do it? Ackerman suggests that a common affliction of middle age is the need to “toughen up,” so, in our play, we create our own boot camp to prove ourselves. Are mid-life women in need of a physical reassurance? Do we choose to test our body’s limits to dramatize the richness of a physical life? To reach our soul do we need first to discover and reacquaint ourselves with our physical form?

Deep play on a sailboat can be a spiritual experience, a way to the soul. Ackerman informs us that “When people reject organized religion, they often fill that need with deep play of one sort or another” (Ackerman, 1999, p. 104). Sailing, then, can be seen as a “play act” in which players fully are involved in something and someplace much larger than the self-- the feeling of being a small boat on a very large sea. Women sailors, then, feel the sense of being “stirred by powerful unseen forces, accompanied by a great spiritual awakening in which life is viewed with fresh eyes” (Ackerman, 1999, p. 105). Is that how it feels to be at sea? Sailors at rest in a power so overwhelming--it must be a god force. Lermontov captures these feelings in a poem.

“Sailboat”

A solitary sail gleams white
Against the blue haze of the sea...

What does it seek on the horizon?
 What does it want to leave behind?
 The waves rear up, a shrill wind whistles,
 The straining mast contorts and creaks...

No, happiness the end.
 Below: the brilliance of an azure current,
 Above: a stream of golden light...
 Rebellious, it needs the tempest,
 As if in tempest rest resides. (Lermontov, as cited in Lencek & Bosker, 2001,
 p. vii)

Our soul search is underway with sail play. It needs the tempest of the sea to create
 the freedom we seek.

...the deep-play world is fresh, wholly absorbing, and full of its own unique
 wisdom and demands. Being able to temporarily step outside of normal life—
 while keeping one's senses alert—is indeed like being reborn. To erase all
 memories and yearnings—to be vigorously alive without self-awareness—can
 provide a brief return to innocence. (Lermontov, as cited in Ackerman, 1999,
 p. 31)

Self-care--Soul Work

Finding ways to nurture the self is also a way for soul rebuilding. Moore
 (1992) claims that we are not just mothered by biological mothers; we also are
 nurtured by society. A society of fellow sailors provides love and support; they serve
 as mothers and mentors for each other. Maternal guidance lives within each of us. It
 is demonstrated in our profound maternal feeling for self-preservation, continuity and
 fruitful activities. These instincts become even stronger when threatened by events
 that affect us such as sickness, loss of employment, divorce or storms (Moore, 1992).
 How does Mother Ocean show women the art of self-care? To survive the sea life one
 must develop self-mothering, self-care. The journey is about the self.

“Sea Motion”

Why do women turn to the sea?
To survive, both physical and spiritual-ly.

My world has been rocked.
Rocked by (s)ea-motion.
The motion that wears on you.
The motion that creates anew.
The motion that wears you out
and bares you out.
I, a child, born from motion.

My skin removed, new exposures.
How deep dare I mine?
Peel away the layers and
Tear down the walls
What will I find?

Abrasion and peeling and
bleeding and healing and
talking and revealing and
finding and binding and
touching and feeling and
trailing and wailing and
discovering and sharing and
loving and weeping and
aging and leaving and
sailing and sailing and
sailing and sailing. (Schaefer, 2001)

An ark, such as Noah’s, carries the seeds of life. A ship becomes a vessel of destiny as the seeds give form to the soul (Lawlor, 1997). Lawlor says the soul is expressed in the three layers of the shelter in which it resides. The inner layer of the shelter is the core or spiritual essence. It is this soul place we seek in our mid-life journey. The second layer is easier to explore. It expresses the soul in the sheltered place of “commingling” body/mind, thought and action (Lawlor, 1997). Finally, the outer layer illuminates the soul through the environmental shelter of climate and

seasonal changes (Lawlor, 1997). Exploring these outer two layers reveals elements of the inner layer, the soul, our core.

As we look at the second layer of the shelter, the commingling of the mind/body, thought and action, we see a woman placed in a world where her physical form is challenged as well as her mental awareness of self in the world. Thoughts and actions explored at sea hold new meaning for her. She is physically and mentally tested in new surroundings, and she experiences a unique commingling with this water world. Exploration of her commingling will reveal her soulful ways. Her surroundings are composed of the trappings of sea survival mixed with carefully chosen land possessions. Combined, they reflect her sense of self in the world. The books she chooses to read, the clothes she chooses to wear, the carefully selected pillows and berth coverings mixed together in her sea shelter, all reflect a part of her soul's identity.

Her outer layer of selected environment consists of the un-obscured highway of oceans that connect all corners of the planet. Sailors are boundary-free as they wander the globe. They choose an intense and intimate exposure to Nature. Their roofs are vulnerable to Nature's most vengeful moods; yet, they choose to watch and live close to Her and mingle with Her harmoniously. No longer able to ignore Her changes with umbrellas, raincoats or hats, the sailor must respect Her every mood and secure their boats and being so not to be harmed. So, too, Her good moods of sunny and windy days can be used to harness the strength and power that will move women to the next port. Solar collection panels and wind generators are used to convert

Nature's power to energy. Harnessed energy stores fuel for the boat's engines and propels women to their destiny. Yes, the souls of mid-life women are revealed through the exploration of their shelters -- bodies on a boat at sea.

Self-care of the body and soul is a critical task in the woman's journey. The woman relearns to think of first herself as she journeys to transcendence. Sea life enables the transforming tasks of "me first" to be practiced. Life at sea is a natural training ground for self preservation-- the last step in the mid-life journey.

Place Considered--A Way to Meaning

Why do women seek a life at sea during mid-life? To access the phenomenon hermeneutically, I engaged in preliminary conversations with Mary and Niki, two women, who in their mid-life, turned to sailing. Mary is a homemaker, retired landscape architect, mother of three grown children, owner of three young Labradors, and co-owner of a new boat. Married to Bill for 25 years, she will be spending 25% of her retired life living on a sailboat and sailing along the East Coast. Niki, a homemaker, mother of two and part-time office manager in her husband's business has been married to Phil for 25 years. She is moving on board a sailboat within the next two years. Now that her grown daughters are in college, she is in the process of selling her home and possessions in Ohio. She and Phil are planning on living aboard their boat and sailing for an indefinite period of time.

Stories and conversations yield themes that fall like unstrung pearls, each a unique creation formed by layers and layers of living stories beautifully sculpted by unique beings. When gathered together, significant themes unfold. The boat emerges

as a place for recreation and transformation where mid-life women go to explore relationships and their place in the world.

Relationships Rediscovered

Sailing and living on a boat represent a “going to” place where couples reunite during an “after-kids” time of life. Mary and Niki shared these ideas about their relationships with their husbands on board a sailboat. The notion of couples resonates in Mary’s dialogue: “Sailing was better for us to do as a couple. In sailing we face adversity, and it is a bonding experience.” For Niki coupling is described in Phil’s voicing an opportunity for “us to have a more one-on-one experience again without the kids.”

Sailing is like a couple’s waltz, compelling motion experienced together on a vehicle giving voice and song to their dance. To “couple” is to come together two by two. “Coupled” is a state of unified being, not alone, not singular, with another. It is a return to the meaning of “until death do us part.” It involves a way of seeing the world through a different lens. Things hidden in day to day existence are discovered, and they open up the heart and soul to what really matters. What is sailing? “I love you” jumps from my lips, and I do not know why. Why does sailing bring love out of me?

When women decide to live on a boat, they are not relying on logic. In light of Husserl’s (1970) view of knowledge, they are relying on intuition that is not affected by preconceived assumptions. Instinctively, they seek a boat, as their space atop the sea where they reunite with their life loves. They seek to rediscover the

companionship of relationships, and their hearts lead them to a ship as the place for this experience.

A ship is a companioning place. Companionship = companion, “a fellow or mate” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 144) + ship. Does this play on words suggest that to be on board a ship promotes companioning among the crew? Companionway is the opening in the ship that leads down into the heart of the vessel. Companionway = companion + way, “direction, style or manner” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 873). Is that the way for companions to go, through a small narrow opening into the depths of the ship, where people can commune and commingle? Does it symbolize a pass-through to a manner or style of existing as a mate? Is a ship designed for companions to retreat into and build relationships?

The “kid factor” comes out loud and clear in my conversations with mid-life women. Children were important themes in the pre-sailing time for both women, each needing to be sure the kids were established and ready to be on their own. Niki recalls: “Before we could sail I needed to know the kids were settled and no longer in need of us. Our goal was to make them independent. I would not raise the kids on a sailboat so we had to wait until they were grown before we could go sailing.” What about the sailing life makes it a “kid-free” zone? Mary says, “The boat was not built for the kids; it was built for us. The kids are welcome aboard on trips, but we would not jeopardize them with ocean sailing at this point. We don’t want the responsibility of risking their health, and it is not their job to escort their aging parents across oceans.”

I read a message cross-stitched on a pillow in a store window: “Mothers nurture the flowers in the garden of life.” Is that how it is being a mother of children? I, a childless woman, struggle with this notion as I try to understand the pull between these women and their offspring. Offspring means “those who spring off someone” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 519). Was that their goal, to gently persuade their children to go their own way so the parents could return to their original coupled state? Is sailing a boat symbolic of a return to their original state, a return to being “two by two” in dreamtime?

A Sense of Place

For Niki and Mary the boat is the place they go now that the kids are grown-- a place for just “us two,” thoughtfully created by caring loving husbands. It is a comfortable place filled with a few familiar things. The boat is their haven where no one enters without invitation, where man and woman reacquaint after a long hiatus of child rearing.

This space for reacquainting is a secret place “where the outer world and the inner world seem to merge into a single, unique and personal world” (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 24). Abram opens up the meaning of secret places:

Here she experiences the secret being of herself, the secret mystery of the “oneness”. Here she could stand apart from others and feel totally encapsulated and submerged in the mystery of life, her own life... Here one can be oneself in order to come to oneself. (1996, p. 224)

Spaces and places are referred to by Heidegger (1953/1996) when he suggests that to, “Actually belong there (place) corresponds to the useful character of what is at hand” (p. 95). That is, a place of choice is about our relevant belonging to the

totality of the useful things it presents. A place of choice, like a boat, is a selection of “useful” things that enables one to cross seas. The selection is purposeful and filled with intent. Women seek ships because of the useful character of the items that exist in that space. The items make a home, and they can take us to special places.

A place called home Our home is our everyday place. How can we leave a land home behind for an everyday sea place? Lawlor (1997) explains how this transition is possible. One’s surroundings “enhance to serve the care of your being” (p. 16). A boat is an everyday place that cares for a sailor’s being. It, too, is a home. Within that space are many symbols that inform us about the meaning of that life. We try to understand the symbols not with our head, but with our soul. This act pushes us to depths of meaning making using our everyday surroundings.

There is a link between soul and form. Our lives are works of art that express that link. Ordinary life contains patterns of our spirit -- who we are and who we want to become. Mining the depths of our daily lives and living places, gives meaning to the phrase, soul searching. “Daily life becomes permeated with purpose and significance” (Lawlor, 1997, p. 20). Our everyday place contains footprints of ourselves, and it is a perfect place to explore who we are, what we value and what we envision in our future. My everyday place is on the ocean.

Soul can be imagined as an ocean of water. The ocean is primordial and inexhaustible, the source of life, the realm of pure potential and infinite possibilities. So too is the soul at the depth of our being. Soul is quiet, profound and boundless. As the depths of the ocean, the water is silent and still unfathomable and mysterious. On the surface, the ocean rises to an innumerable assortment of waves: large and small, fast and slow, rolling and crashing. In some places the ocean becomes solid ice. In other, it turns into airy vapor, ascending to become clouds and rain...On the surface, the soul

flows into countless variety of emotions and thoughts that propel our actions. Sometimes, soul is experienced as gentle softness; at other times, it has a firm power. (Lawlor, 1997, p. 24)

Our home on the ocean in a boat becomes a setting for inquiry into our process of living (Lawlor, 1997) and into our souls. Is that why women seek a life on a boat? A boat is attuned to the here and now of daily living; we find sacredness in the simple ways of boat space. This dwelling at sea becomes a means to “reconnect mind, body, environment and spirit into the integrated wholeness of the psyche... each action in such a place is experienced as a step toward creating, dissolving and re-creating life” (p. 36).

A place to dwell. What is this notion of place? Is it dwelling within or indwelling? Place can be a dwelling place, memory place or mood place. It is a physical and emotional concept. Place is many faceted; like a diamond, each angle reflects a different light; each part of place has its own personal meaning and view. The physical place of a boat contains unique components. The deck, galley, berth, bilge, and keel all compose the physical space within. To dwell in that unique place, is an experience worth exploring. Understanding the act of “dwelling within,” takes us to another level of soul appraisal. Casey asks, “Do we really know how dwelling actually happens?” (1993, p. 112).

Our built place “staves off chaos” (Casey, 1993, p. 112), but how does our “dwelling within” a place speak to the unique experience of the dweller? We experience dwelling in a temporal place and the experience is exclusive to the dweller.

How does dwelling in place reveal self? The old English etymology of the word *dwelling* is to “dawdle or wander” (Casey, 1993, p. 112). Thus, one wanders within the place of dwelling. Said another way, dwelling is accomplished not by residing but by wandering. Wandering through familiar space is a reflective journey of appreciating collected items in a constructed space. Life is a dwelling journey.

What constitutes a dwelling place? Casey (1993) suggests we consider two concepts. First, dwelling places are constructed (either physically or mentally) to allow for repeated returns. This does not mean the dwelling is stationary. A Bedouin, for example, lives in a tent but moves it from place to place. The tent, like a boat, represents a moving dwelling place to which one can return. Secondly, a dwelling place must possess a certain felt familiarity. Thus, that place to which one repeatedly returns and which becomes increasingly familiar, constitutes a dwelling.

People, in turn, can transform the site of dwelling by their constant departures and returning. Leaving and returning pilgrimages and nomadic treks, shape and change our dwelling spaces and places. Pilgrims and nomads alter their dwelling ways with each journey. The pilgrim changes the dwelling, and the dwelling changes the pilgrim.

Casey (1993) suggests that we can take on the traits of our dwelling place and *visa versa*. If we are reclusive and introspective, so, too, will our choice of space reflect our inner self. What does that say about cruising women who choose a boat as a dwelling place? Can we deconstruct the ship and the journey to know the inhabitant

better? Considering a boat as a dwelling place, can it reveal insights into the phenomenon of why women choose it during mid-life?

Choosing a boat for dwelling can be considered a transitory decision made by people at an in-between place of being. It becomes a respite for mid-life women who still have one foot on the land. Casey describes this place as a “transitional” place. It exists between the known and unknown, the dirt and water, the question and the answer. It is not transitory like a superficial way-station, but rather it is transitional, allowing for a gentle moving to another place in time,

...a place for creative action, providing enough protection to encourage experimentation (if not outright exploration) without being overly confining. In Freud’s metaphor, such a situation is like a “reservation” set aside so that certain actions not possible elsewhere can be undertaken here. (Casey, 1993, p. 122)

Our body is also a place of dwelling. It is a "proto-place existing in opposition to counter-places” (Casey, 1993, p. 131). It is the receptacle for the tension created between environmental forces. By living in the tension, the body creates a leeway -- a place of openness where creativity occurs. The dwelling journey within our body can be revealed with the help of the transitional places in which we choose to reside. Making the journey within, can be facilitated by the dwelling place we choose.

A place of solitude. Though a boat is a small space where two people cohabit in close surroundings, it would seem that the ability to find solitude and self-time is nearly impossible. This is not the case. A boat is full of alone spaces. In fact, sea people seem more sensitive and respectful of the need for separateness, and when one seeks to be alone, the solitude can be complete.

For a crew of two people, night watches are times of solitude. One crewmember sleeps, while the other manages the helm, on watch. The motion of the boat at sea is mesmerizing. Though fully alert, the helmsman is rocked to another place. Lawlor captures this feeling in his description of restful alertness and solitude.

In the restful alertness of meditation, prayer, study, writing, drawing, and playing music, the mind and body settle into the luminous silence of our true nature. During the active solitude encountered in exercise, yoga, or tai chi, we learn to integrate the silence of the soul with dynamic movement... A place of solitude provides a setting for rediscovering the dormant powers within us. In the silence of such a place, we can listen to the soul whispering its needs and dreams. (Lawlor, 1997, p. 154)

On a ship, do people find a unique place of solitude where restful alertness is possible? Ships are arks of sacredness that hold a wisdom to which outsiders are not privileged. On a ship we hear the “soul whisper” (p. 154). Is that why mid-life women venture to this place? Through solitude, are they seeking a state of restful alertness that will enable conversations with their souls? The space on a ship becomes the home for whispering souls.

Their “space” ship. Consider the space within a boat. To understand space we must take the concept of distance out of its familiar meaning. Space is understood through our being-in; thus, we must de-distance space to understand the being-in of that space (Heidegger, 1953/1996). De-distancing, according to Heidegger, means making distance disappear, bringing distance near. Thus, we understand the Being or essence of a person’s space choice through a de-distancing deconstruction of space. Giving way to space understanding and object relationships is really an act of making room for our understanding. It makes “actual factual orientation possible”

(Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 103). A vessel full of soul is like a cauldron of spiritual soup. We mix and stir the soulful elements of selected objects, which, in turn, create feelings and soulfulness. De-distancing the objects make them amorphous, allowing them to blend with each other. The cauldron holds within it a complete whole. Considering soulful objects on the boat in a de-distancing way, allows for the creation of a soul-filled “space ship.”

Our sense of place is defined by home or dwelling spaces. These sacred places provide us with solitude and object relations that enhance the mid-life journey. Places chosen reveal soul, and choice understood, reveals Being. Have we found a way to search for our grail?

The Mid-life Journey--Women in Search of a Holy Grail

For what are mid-life women searching? Is there a holy grail on the other side of the ever illusive horizon? Bolen uses the medieval story of knights in search of the Holy Grail as a metaphor to explore women’s search for transcendence in mid-life. Women are described as teetering on the verge of a journey, venture, gateway or threshold where there is synchronicity between life events and dream symbolism (Bolen, 1994). It is a time we are available to be changed; we open like a flower ready to experience the whole view of our world. The experience offers no accidental interactions, but rather, relations that occur for a purpose, and whose meanings take time to understand.

Is a mid-life “crisis” really a spiritual quest, a call for this “inner feeling” we seek (Bolen, 1994)? Like pilgrims we are drawn to our destiny. Bolen describes

pilgrims as travelers and nomads who feel their way to a new life. Are sailing women pilgrims who are feeling their way to self-rediscovery? The pilgrimage of sailing a boat to a destination exposes the sailors to new dimensions in their lives, because “Pilgrimages invite reflection” (Bolen, 1994, p. 83).

Steven Callahan is a sailor. He was adrift in a rubber dingy for 76 days after his boat sank in the Atlantic Ocean. He explains the pilgrimage of going to sea.

Many of my friends still couldn't understand why I wanted to undertake such a voyage, why I couldn't test myself without crossing the Atlantic. But there was more to the crossing than simply putting myself to the test. From the first time I ventured from the shore in a boat, I felt that my spirit was touched. On my first offshore trip to Bermuda, I began to think of the sea as my chapel. It was my soul that called me to the pilgrimage. (Callahan, 1986, p. xvii)

The experience of the journey changes people and it is this phenomenon of change that is captured in the telling. Each story holds its own unique truth from the perspective of each teller. Integration of the experiences of their journeys into group consciousness and meaning is life altering for those women open to the possibility (Bolen, 1994).

Transformation occurs through the connection of the ego with the self. Sailing reconnects ego and self by compelling sailors to reexamine human relationships, their sense of place in space and what it means to live in the heart of Nature. Their stories allow us to bear witness to this connection, and their dialogue with one another gives credibility to the journey. Women seek others with whom to share the transformative experience. They hunger for the two-way dialogue about the lived events. Like Quakers, they bear witness to each other's stories when they express the essence of the experience and have it received in depth by another. The rituals and tasks

undertaken are part of what is shared. The journey and quest retold, reveals the soul of each participant.

Rituals of the Sea--Steps to Spirituality

Does a mid-life journey on a boat have its own rituals and spiritual acts? Can boat rituals serve as catalysts to change our view of the world? “Rituals use repetition to create the experience of walking the same path again and again with the possibility of discovering new meaning that would otherwise be invisible” (Bateson, 1994, pp. 114-115). Boat rituals such as coiling a rope, flaking sails, and preparing a bunk for sleep are repetitive rhythmic tasks. The repeated release of ropes that tie a boat to a dock ritualize the act of release from the every day way--the land. Release from the land is symbolic for Becky Bryson. In her September 25, 1992 logbook entry, made in route from St. Lucia to Martinique on board her 44-foot sailboat, she shares these thoughts.

To leave port is to die a little. When we pulled away from the dock in Miami, crossed Biscayne Bay and moved into the Gulf Stream leaving American waters behind, I felt a wrenching sense of loss and a great deal of anxiety. It was one of the most difficult separations of my life. And yet, I simultaneously experienced a feeling of exhilaration and rising hope for the future as we reached for the far horizon on a sea that would take us places we had always longed to see. (personal journal, September 25, 1992)

Encores of breaking ties with the land are significant to those who live on the water. As the lines are released from the dock, they are thrown onto the boat deck in a mass of tangled coils. The crew takes the line’s end, and while watching the land recede, begins to coil the strands with concentric circles that follow each other until the “bitter end” is wrapped around the bundle, and secured with a slip knot. With

each departure, there are at least five ropes to coil in this orderly and rhythmic fashion. As in a trance, the crew completes the task. Focusing energy on routine actions is ritualistic in that people channel their energy and emotion in a focused way (Bolen, 1994). Energy channeled into these rituals clears one of anger, fear, loneliness and suppressed frustrations, "...rituals, intentions, prayers and meditations provide invisible channels for emotions that surge up" (p. 123). Rituals of boat life provide mid-life women with a focused avenue for negative energy and emotional baggage. Rituals practiced on a boat help them to let go of emotional burdens, heal souls and lead to self-discovery.

The ritual of docking a boat is an example of channeled energy. It is outlined in an article by Tina Olton, "End Your Cruise Safely," where she describes how she and her shipmate dock their boat.

There is a routine for entering port that we always follow whatever the length of the passage. We first review together the course into the harbor, what buoys, obstructions, and landmarks should be accounted for, and what our possible courses will be. Reviewing this information together and well in advance of the entrances is essential so that we can help each other as we move along... We keep the appropriate paper charts in the cockpit for easy reference, along with any pilot that has helpful drawings or photos of the area. Even when we are coming into a harbor that is familiar as our homeport of San Francisco, we pick all the important reference points for each other as we go along... Unless there is a good reason for not doing so (such as the engine not working properly) we always take the sails down outside a harbor, anchorage or marina. Doing this gives us plenty of room to maneuver in case a sail gets stuck as it is being lowered or we need some extra time to furl the main in the conditions... Before we enter a marina, we rig all dock lines and fenders on both sides of the boat... We also rig a stern anchor and have it ready... We keep several extra lines on deck ready to use for any unexpected reason... We stack cockpit cushions in a corner, stow dishes, books and other materials below. I pick up the extra lines and put them below and carefully coil the ends of the dock lines. (Olton, 2002, pp. 44-48)

Their docking ritual has made them a disciplined team well respected in the cruising community. This is one of many rituals practiced by this couple who have been voyaging for 10 years. They attribute their trouble-free voyaging to their adherence to ritualistic behaviors and habits on board.

Rituals are a part of sailing a boat. They unite crew and make for safe voyages. What do women on a boat learn from these rituals that shape their minds and bodies? The focused energy and thought resulting from ritualistic behaviors helped Olton sail over 90,000 miles without mishap. Was it the singular acts themselves or the focused energy that was created from the repetition of the acts that kept them safe? Can the rituals of sailing focus our inner power in spiritually transcending ways? Does sailing help us step over into a spiritual frame of mind?

Callahan understands the spiritual upheaval that results from life at sea.

I wish I could describe the feeling of being at sea, the anguish, frustration, and fear, the beauty that accompanies threatening spectacles, the spiritual communion with creatures in whose domain I sail. There is a magnificent intensity in life that comes when we are not in control but are only reacting. I am not a religious man per se. My own cosmology is convoluted and not in line with any particular church or philosophy. But for me to go to sea is to get a glimpse of the face of God. At sea I am reminded of my insignificance—of all men's insignificance. It is a wonderful feeling to be so humbled. (Callahan, 1986, p. xvii)

This spiritual place is also described by Bolen (1994, p. 94), “This is a place where the veil becomes thinner.” Our view of the world becomes clear as the haze of the day-to-day life lifts, and we see another way. We have stepped over the edge, the threshold, the verge and we are in the place of connections where the veil is thinner.

The veil is thinner here.
 We see past today to another way.
 A restless sailor she
 seeking relief from life at sea.
 There is a bigger force at work,
 connected to planet and universe.

Free at sea, she “swings on a star,
 carries moonbeams home in a jar,
 and is better off than we are” (Disney, 1942)
 Or, would you rather be a landlubber? (Schaefer, 2002)

Avalon’s Four Tasks to Transcendence

Where is my Avalon--the place of the Holy Grail? “Avalon is an ‘other’ world place, visible only under special conditions and to particular people” (Bolen, 1994, p.126):

It is a place of landscapes that affect us like dreams or poems or music that moves us out of our everyday reality into a deeper archetypal realm where images and feeling intuitions or sensations that we otherwise would not feel are felt... We leave the ordinary world behind and venture into another world. (p. 127)

Do all women make the journey to Avalon or is it a self-selected group? Not all women seek transcendence at mid-life, but will transcendence occur for them anyway? Bolen tells us a story about a handless maiden who is told her hands will begin to grow if she goes into the forest on a quest. Though she has been without hands all her life, given the option, she wants to live a complete life. The return of her hands represents her coming of age into the role of comforter and healer for the world. She is told that in order for her hands to grow, she has to complete four tasks. The tasks represent what the feminine psyche must learn in order to grow (Bolen, 1994).

First, the maiden must demonstrate that she looks ahead to future tasks. She sorts them out and makes sense of them. Thinking about the future, she prepares herself mentally for what may occur (Bolen, 1994). Apter (1995) in agreement tells us women at mid-life are “ripe for significant changes” (p. 23). Second, the maiden gains power without losing her sense of self and who she is. She becomes self-sufficient (Bolen, 1994). Apter, again reminds us that women at mid-life begin to trust themselves and realize that their own experiences matter and, in fact, “provide the best line to the truth” (1995, p. 28). Third, the maiden lives long enough to see patterns in her life and, having seen them, acts decisively on her own behalf. Fourth, the maiden stops rescuing others and focuses on her own needs (Bolen, 1994). “...[S]he confronts her surprise discovery that her potential must be realized now or never. She retrieves neglected needs and wishes and finally wages battle against the dragons that have stood in her way” (Apter, 1995, p. 24).

These four tasks are self-serving to the maiden’s development of Being. They represent the unification of the ego with the unconscious. Her hands grow back when the unification occurs. Bolen reminds us that the tasks of life represent unconscious achievements by women, each bringing her closer to the discovery of her holy grail. Once the grail is found, the wisdom gained from the search is shared with the world and ultimately serves us all with new visions (Bolen, 1994).

I wonder if all women undertake these tasks as they age. The four tasks of the handless maiden are challenges that have been undertaken by female sailors from other time periods. History reminds us of 18th century women sailors; they went to

sea during times of war disguised as men. Why did they take such desperate measures? What soul healing tasks did they seek? Their motives provide insight to the female attraction to the sea. Wheelwright (1989) uncovers compelling reasons women chose to go to sea. By dressing as men, they gained access to work that was financially rewarding, men's earnings being substantially more than earnings of women of that time. Also, women found that "Making a living as a man was simply easier and more satisfying" (Wheelwright, p. 5) than working in traditional female jobs. Another reason women went to sea, was for the opportunity for adventure and escape from the drudgery of female work. Women found that enlisting on a ship as a man for commercial or military duty "enabled them to travel and experience the world through male eyes" (p. 93).

The motives of 18th century women sailors mirror the motives for undertaking the four tasks of Avalon. Like the handless maiden, the female sailors looked ahead for future adventures, sought power and self-sufficiency and acted on their own behalf and in their own interest. They, too, were on a path to transcendence.

Mary Anne Arnold, born in Sheerness, England in 1825, went to sea in 1836 when she realized that boys her age were in every way in a superior condition to her. Borrowing a friend's trousers, she signed aboard a Sutherland collier and worked on various merchant ships until her detection in 1839. (Wheelwright, 1989, p. 165)

Wheelwright makes an important point by reminding us that the sailing women of the 18th century did not want to become like men, but rather, they wanted to experience the male place in the world. This sentiment is captured in the description of Mary Anne Arnold.

The happiest situation occurred when the female warrior could choose her own moment of disclosure and freely return to her true sex. Some used their male disguise to accomplish a goal – to travel, to earn a better living, to find someone – that once realized, rendered their masquerade unnecessary. (p. 97)

Women of today seek the sea not necessarily to compete with or to be like men, but rather to achieve the four tasks of Avalon. Seeking freedom and challenging the self at sea through sailing, is a worthy pursuit in its own right. The opportunities for self renewal and self-care become a sought after goal.

In the introduction of their book, Sail Away; Stories of Escaping to Sea, Lencek and Bosker describe what happens to the sailor when the four tasks of Avalon become integrated into their being:

At sea, the landlubber eye instantly adjusts, capable of reading the cryptic language of natural phenomena for which there is no exact counterpart on shore. The surface texture of water, the smoothness or chop of the seas, the feel of the wind, the smell of the air, even the color and shape of the foam flecking the cresting waves—these are all signs that the eye must learn to read. For most of us, that elementary foreignness of being at sea turns us into visionaries. (2001, p. xii)

Do mid-life women sail with the intention of developing themselves and becoming visionaries? Do they realize that a boat provides a unique environment where the four tasks of Avalon can be actualized? In fact, they will not survive at sea unless they do seek to accomplish the four tasks of transcendence. The boat life is a way some women choose to start the mid-life journey to their holy grail. Why do some women never get off the boat?

Is it the looking forward to our horizon and aft to our wake that reveals our life? Understanding the composition of life's makeup leads to soul comprehension.

Each experience on this journey creates another square that is stitched into the quilt we call a lifetime. Life is the quilted composition of lived experiences.

The Mid-life Journey--Life as Composition

Bateson (1990) considers mid-life from a different point of view. She sees women's mid-life time not as a search, but rather as a composition of collected experiences under constant revision; it is coming to realization of our lived lives. She suggests that life is not a grail quest. It is not a linear journey with a prize at the end. Life is back and forth and up and down; it is multifaceted. What insights are gained from the multiplicity and ambiguity of 20th century life? What do we learn from the present, and what components of our past help us unlock our daily riddles? Back and forth and up and down and round and round the spiral of life defines our way of being.

Thus, in being, everything is circuitous, roundabout, recurrent, so much talk; a chaplet of sojourning, a refrain with endless verses...But what a spiral man's being represents...and what a number of invertible dynamisms there are in this spiral! One no longer knows right away whether one is running toward the center or escaping...the spiraled being who, from outside, appears to be a well-invested center, but who will never reach his center. The being of man is an unsettled being which all expression unsettles. In the reign of the imagination, an expression is hardly proposed, before being needs another expression, before it must be the being of another expression. (Bachelard, 1958/1994, p. 214)

Is that the grail we seek, moments of daily expression collected and recollected until a life is composed? Life is a patchwork of experiences, which compose a person's Being. Bateson suggests that to live is always to be in flux with a continual back and forth motion of reimagining the future and reinterpreting the past, which gives meaning to the present. Like a boat propelling itself forward by crisscrossing an

oncoming breeze, we are "...zigzag people. Learning to transfer experience from one cycle to the next, we progress like a sailboat tacking into the wind" (Bateson, 1994, p. 82).

Mid-life women see backward with their eyes of memory and they see forward with their hearts. Composing a life is a process of integrating one's past and future commitments with the interactions and changes of the present. "Aware of a new maturity, she reviews her past--not to sum it up, as an elderly person might, but to get a better view of the future" (Apter, 1995, p. 151).

Bateson (1994) suggests that life is an unfolding. It is not a series of chronological episodes with a set of rules as described by Bolen's journey to Avalon. There are no rules or lists of specific tasks, that when achieved, mark one's transcendence. Bateson's approach to the subject offers a more practical and contemporary view of life. Like the lapping of waves on the beach, our life reflects the back and forth motions of beings in fluctuation. We use our past to build our future, and our vision of the possible is built upon the present state of affairs. Bolen's chronological descriptions seem simplistic when compared to life's complex compositions woven from remembered ways, mixed in with current events and sprinkled with futuristic vision. That is, the sailing life is a spiraling whirlwind of past, present and future events that play over and over guiding us through uncharted waterways. "Spiral learning moves through complexity with partial understanding, allowing for later returns" (Bateson, 1994, p. 31).

Who are these Sailing Women?

Sailing women are part of the larger population of women of the world. Sea women are global beings who represent a microcosm of a gender whose unique lived ways reveal meaning that is applicable to growth of the sisterhood of women world-wide. The women in my study are all in their mid-life, and they came from the east and west coast of the United States, Canada, and South Africa. Seeking the sea as their place for residing on the planet, each are active members of the global sailing community. Sailing women were once of the land and have turned to the sea in a conscious act of choosing. They share similarities with land people such as husbands, children, bills, ageing parents, illness, and bad-hair days. They listen to the news, buy groceries, and wash clothes. They dry their hair, shave their legs, gain weight, and gossip. They were born and raised on the land at some point in their evolution chose to live in a space of significantly reduced size that moves along the surface of water away from the shores of the land. The meaning of their life is no more profound than that of others; it is just shaped and affected by unique aquatic factors that tease out meaning in wonderful ways. Just as some mid-life women choose to sail on a boat, others choose to scale a mountain top, dive in the ocean, fly an airplane, or tuck her child into bed. When we search beyond the surface and make inquiry into deeper meaning, the meaning of life is found within the lived ways of all life fronts. Themes found in a mid-life woman's sailing life revealed through phenomenological methodology mirror and echo themes of other life choices. All women nod their

heads in agreement as we share similar experiences in different arenas or different experiences in similar female ways.

Those who wander the sea are not lost beings looking for the land, they are focused and purposeful participants in a world that makes similar demands of all women. At sea, however, the experiences are framed in a unique setting which magnifies and captures meaning in a special light. This special way of illumination may help meaning speak in a louder voice. I have come to know that the rugged place of the sea breeds robust individuals whose expressive language and welcoming ways enable deep meaningful conversations to occur. This verbal dialogue brings the attentive listener beyond the tedious work-a-day conversations, so common among busy people, to a deeper reflective exchange that opens us to the meaning of life's lived experiences.

Heidegger warns of superficial life acts. Day to day lives of busyness – can lead to “falling prey to inauthentic being...This tempting tranquilization aggravates entanglement” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 166). With inauthenticity, our clearness vanishes and we fail to be part of authentic ways. Can the tensions of life at sea help us overcome inauthentic being? Can our superficial actions of the land be replaced with the sea's required authentic acts of survival and focus? Trying to have it all in everyday life has been identified by Heidegger as falling prey and leading to the plunge. “*Dasein* plunges out of itself, into itself, into the groundlessness and nothingness of inauthentic everydayness” (p. 167).

Sailors can also fall prey to inauthentic everyday acts. The sea life, however, lends itself to an easier transition from inauthentic being to focused and transcending ways of becoming for those women who seek this way. If open to the possibility, the sailor is surrounded by opportunities to create significant character changes. The development of character, through acts of authentic being, starts at sea as we consider our relationships with others.

The Give and Take of Relationships in a Composed Life

How do we create a bond with others? How does life on a boat both break and build bonds? Bateson talks about the importance of the “give and take” that exists in diverse relationships. Collaboration between past and present informants weaves the threads of memory and creates a single fabric that defines who we are. “The inner sense of self and the assurance of membership is something that comes into being and grows through relationships and participation between, members of the human community” (Bateson, 1994, p. 61).

Bryson speaks to this in a logbook entry written during a long sea passage to Martinique. She talks about friendships as she laments her absence from those she loves.

For me living is giving and giving is living. In the beginning (of her sailing circumnavigation), I was struggling so I had little left to give, and we were so isolated there was no one to receive it, even if I had anything to give. Initially, we only had each other, which in many ways was wonderful. In other ways, it was not enough; it sometimes felt like Anna Karenina. We had encapsulated ourselves in the most romantic of situations, but in so doing, we had divorced ourselves from all else that weighs near and dear, all the family and friends and institutions that have embraced us through the years. It has been a difficult separation for me, but through letters, phone calls, visits... we have been able to keep in touch and that has meant a great deal... In the beginning we missed

community life but now we have a community of boaters. Since Georgetown, we have kept up with 30 other boats via radio and we are usually traveling with two to six of them. On our crossing from the Turks and Caicos to the Dominican Republic, we sailed with 16 boats. That night as we looked across the ocean at so many boats I said, ‘Isn’t it comforting seeing so many lights in the dark’? (Bryson, 1992)

Women look in a reflexive way, both inward as well as outward, for the “other.” “There is no self without the other... for all these present with me now are a source of identity and partners in my survival” (Bateson, 1994, p. 75). The bond with others is made possible because of our differences. Friends with differing opinions are informants and guides who promote learning, especially in unexplored terrain. Relationships generally start with symmetry, each seeking the other because of common interests. In time, however, we find that similarities are not enough. The relationship stagnates unless differences are added. Seeking interactions with diverse others becomes necessary (Bateson, 1994). The purposeful journey of mind expansion is one in search of differences. We search for diversity and change agents in order to experience a life-changing voyage. The going forward to new relationships is fueled by our history and past experiences. The ever going back to revisit past relationships allows us to decipher the mysteries of the present.

“Differences”

We differ you and I.
 We compliment,
 Yin and Yang,
 LOUD and soft,
 opinionated and submissive,
 tolerant and “in your face.”

I respect and need your opposition
 to make me whole.

You lack my ways and disposition,
yet, need them to complete your soul.

Lucky us working well together,
appreciating the differences
the more diverse the better. (Schaefer, 2002)

Differences and asymmetry are not about dominance and weakness. They are about mutual discovering and learning from each other especially in unexplored terrain (Bateson, 1990). A sailboat in foreign water becomes a perfect environment for relationship building. Each friend and shipmate learns from the other creating relationships that last. Bernon made a log entry in her sailing journal that was published in Cruising World Magazine (April, 2002) called, "Talk about Girl Talk." She reflects on the ways cruising women nurture each other with friendship. Whenever cruising women gather, the "emotional floodgates open" (p. 92). She remembers the bonds created and recalls each friend with a collected recipe.

I have a worn notebook filled with years of taped-in recipes. Lately, the pages are from cruising friends with whom we've shared out-of-the-way corners of the western Caribbean. From *Flow* is Karen's Thai lobster flambé; from *Sea Camp*, Diane's hearty breads; from *Baerne*, Ing's yogurt and cheese; from *My Bonnie*, Sue's cinnamon buns, made with sourdough starter named Herman who's been living in her fridge for two years... Each recipe brings back memories of sharing joys and fears with cruising women, helping and teaching one another, talking... One lightens the load of the other. (Bernon, 2002, p. 92)

The "I" has meaning only in context of the "other" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 111). Being alone in solitude has meaning only in the context of "others" being in the world. There is no "I" without the "other." There is no "alone" without a world of "others." The reflection of the "other" in our eyes allows for a balance of spirits that unifies forever. Unless we treasure our differences with others, we will never achieve

interdependence (Bateson, 1990). Bateson guides our understanding and reminds us that the reason we value differences in people is because differences foster creative acts. Diversity in talents lends itself to sustained creativity with a rich sense of complementarity and interdependence. United on a sailboat, the crew appreciates the strength that differences bring to problem solving. Sailing with diverse others, fosters relationship building that constructs a creative terrain where transcendence to new ways flourish.

A Sense of Place in a Composed Life--A Place We Call Home

Authentic being also is realized in the places we compose for ourselves. Women in mid-life seek a place where space for creativity is realized, strengths are fostered and possibilities are increased. Does a boat that serves as a home at sea represent that type of space? Bateson suggests that the place we call home is a composition of differences and complementarities where personal growth is possible (Bateson, 1990). Bryson talks about her home at sea.

I must say, I would endure almost any hardship, inconvenience, or discomfort to have this life I am presently living. The marine environment is beautiful beyond words; it always provides adventure and is forever eventful and challenging. I often pretend I am Columbus, discovering the new world. Each day is a fresh beginning and that for me is one of the most exciting things about this new life. The transition has not been easy, but at the moment, I would not trade lives with anyone. I am glad we went to sea...I love my new home. (personal journal, Sept. 14, 1992)

Leaving home and going home. “I don’t want to go home.” What does that mean--not wanting home and instead seeking other places? Why do we run away from home and leave behind the familiar? Can we have more than one home?

Back and forth the waves remove the beach. Over and over the water erodes the land until it disappears. Erosion means “gnawing away” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 250). Gnawing is a word that leads one to imagine a painful pulling away. Leaving land is a pulling away from and taking down that is not easy. We gnaw and remove the hard land of home from our lives and replace it with water--the essence of the human body. We live to erode the land (our home) so we can return to water (our beginning). Women leave the land and go to the sea as an act of returning to the original home.

“Run Away”

I am running away from home.
 I am running off to sea.
 Why me?
 I seek adventure, independence and creativity.

Like women before me have known
 The body must find its way home.
 So we run away to the sea
 I flee the land to spend time with me. (Schaefer, 2002)

The original place of home is deconstructed as we take it apart in an act of relocation. Sailors who leave the land behind often must deconstruct their “homes” as they reconstruct a home at sea.

Deconstructing the place of home. I loved my house by the creek in Annapolis; it was my land home. I painted it bright yellow with light blue trim to look like an island house, right out of Bermuda. It was sunny all year long. My house was filled with treasures from my 50 year life journey; it was my retreat from the world. Last April, I sold that house and stored its possessions to live at sea. Like an out-

grown shell, I felt confined within its stucco walls. What meaning can be revealed as we consider the act of deconstructing one's place of dwelling?

When moving onto a sailboat to live full-time, sailors leave most trappings of the land behind. They disassemble, deconstruct, and abandon their land place. They cross a threshold to a new way of living and leave behind a house filled with objects. During the deconstruction, they consider the fate of each object. Floods of memories come forward as they decide what to discard, keep, and take with them. To "keep" something comes from the old English word *capion* which means, "to look" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 411). Why do we choose to look upon some objects and not others? What meaning can be uncovered by reconsidering what is kept? Levinas (1961/1969) reminds us that it is through the acts of separating that we come to realize our selves in our "totality" (p. 220), as beings separate from the Other. When we separate from objects we go through a process of examining our "plurality" (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 121), the relationships we have with objects and Others. This act of examination reveals the "infinity" (Levinas, p. 17) of our being, a way to freedom and creativity leading to Avalon, our a transcended state.

"Cross the Threshold"

Allow it to happen, don't be afraid.
Surrender to the crossing.
The flow of the water carries you away.
Float with it and reap the blessing.

Let go of the treasures.
Kiss them away.
Their souls remain.
Can you feel them?

Release them.
Now you are free, fly away.
Their memory lingers-let them.

Meaning remembered,
Hold them dear every day.
Now, time to go.
Sail away. (Schaefer, 2002)

I am deconstructing my place of residing, my home. *Construction* comes from an Old French word that means “an act of translation” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 155). To deconstruct something can mean to de-translate it or return it to its originally stated way. By removing the being that is no longer of it, we deconstruct a home to its original form, a house. A house without being is no longer a home, for a home is the dwelling place of the soul (Lawlor, 1997).

My house was a physical place of my invention, the dwelling place of my extraordinary self. Those who entered it saw many parts of me, but they did so from their own perspective. Care must be taken when considering another’s possessions without knowing the story of their origin, for objects alone are not the authentic being understood; they are only the Other’s perceptions of me. The trappings of the physical are not true illustrations of the authentic self. They are mirrors that reflect what the observer wants to see. Objects considered without narration are dust-collectors that fill empty shelves. Without stories, possessions are perceived and interpreted by the Other at will, an act which can confuse and disrupt our “plurality” (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 121), our uniqueness. Without their owner’s voice, they are silent symbols that exist in “totality” (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 220) not reflective of the true inner life of the infinite self.

Collected objects, possessions, are a means to reveal meaning, but they are not meaning itself. Deconstructing the household around them peels away their encasement, and the stories of their being in the world, my world, come forth for sharing with Others. The process of deconstruction becomes a process of building as meaning shared becomes meaning made for the interested Other. Deconstruction reconstructs meaning at this mid-point time of life as objects taken from my house and stored away are labeled with language, stories. Words written in indelible ink insure my thoughts will be lasting as they sing the song of my creative self, my “infinity” (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 121) from the surfaces of my kept treasures.

“Deconstruction”

I deconstruct to recreate.
 I tear apart to make anew.
 I take down and consider meaning.
 I story my objects to reveal myself.

Take this thing of mine and make it yours.
 Your imaginings hold new meaning.
 What do you think about when you take it on?
 What will you reveal now that it is yours?

Deconstruction creates meaning.
 Objects become story
 My stores change you
 My object becomes yours. (Schaefer, 2002)

The deconstruction of my house is a rebirthing of my new home, and reconsidering my possessions is an act of reflecting on my past and present being. Separating from my possessions “...designates the possibility of an existent being set up and having its own destiny to itself, that is, being born and dying without the place of this birth and this death in the time of universal history being the measure of its reality”

(Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 55). This rebirth from past ways introduces us to a way of being where everything is pending and all things are possible (Levinas, 1961/1969).

Home-making. Bateson suggests that a home is created through hard work that creates a special space. “There is real work involved in housekeeping and providing food and shelter, but even if we learn to minimize the mechanics of their (women) job, the tasks of home-making can not be eliminated for their value goes beyond the mechanical” (Bateson, 1990, p. 123). Women strengthen relationships by making a home a special place. The home-making rituals of life aboard a boat, such as setting a table, making coffee, or coiling a rope bind crew together. Washing dishes together, becomes an act of trust and intimacy between two people in their constructed place. The nearness of two bodies side by side, the brief touching of hands, the handing off of common items over and over again, the sorting out and reorganization of familiar things makes the act of washing dishes an intimate sharing experience. “Relationships need the continuity of repeated actions and familiar space almost as much as human beings need food and shelter” (Bateson, 1990, p. 126).

Life on a boat for a woman is a task-focused place, one where the “to do list” is endless. Not supported by the convenient tools of the land, a cruising woman is required to perform ritualistic tasks to get through the day. These tasks of choice define life on the boat for women. Independent females become self-sufficient to the point that land conveniences such as dishwashers and washing machines are less necessary; rather, they soap hands and remove dirt manually. The act of making soapy water and rubbing dirty surfaces is a ritual for “making things right,” the

ordering of place and home. Home-making at sea is not perceived by the doer as acts of servitude. In life's composition, the women of the water develop a unique perspective of their self-sufficient, "salty" response to the world.

Some boat people see these ritualistic tasks as trademarks of rugged individualism --"salty." Washing their clothes by hand becomes a statement of self-care and self-love. Tasks once performed on land are no longer chores of housekeeping, but rather rhythms of home-making. Going home to a boat does not hold the same meaning as going home to a house on land. To go home to a boat is to return to endless tasks of familiar home-making. The tasks' never-ending presence and performance shape our place, our space, our nest. These "salty" tasks enable life to exist at sea.

Through home-making, boat people have a different perception. "We transform our attitude toward all productive work and toward the planet into expressions of home-making, where we create and sustain the possibility of life" (Bateson, 1990, p. 136). A place called "boat" is where life is created and women are reborn.

Caring in a Composed Life

Mid-life women often are involved in "intergenerational caring" (Grambs, 1989, p. 142) as they care for both their children and aged parents. "This age group is often called the 'sandwich generation' (Neugarten, 1968) as they are often coping with the care of aging parents while dealing with their own children who are in adolescence or young adulthood and require attention as well" (Fodor, 1990, p. 41).

The emotional pull between these two types of dependents can be very strong and the tensions created very real. Research shows that the bonds of caring that tie mothers to daughters today will continue to be as strong for succeeding generations (Grambs, 1989). What does that emotional pull mean for mid-life women who have chosen a life that limits close proximity to children and parents? Can the tension created from their bonds of caring become a transformative experience?

Care of others. Taking care of others is a key component in the composition of a life. It “emerges in every activity from electrical engineering to book keeping or farming” (Bateson, 1990, p. 143). This thread of care, that weaves itself through our lives, is alive with soul. The capacity to care depends on our early experiences of receiving love and effective care. This essence of caring is distilled into the stuff of soul--the nectar of transcendence. To be open to the possibility of “another way,” one must be able to love openly and care for others.

Niki and Mary talk about the challenges of caring for their husbands at sea, and creating a place or home for them. This skill, “to care,” is part of the make up of humans of all ages. It is a skill that can be learned, and, once mastered, leads to authentic being. Bateson says care-taking is a part of the composition of every day life, and it is always complementary and never symmetrical. The other will care for the one in greatest need of care (Bateson, 1990). Couples at sea remember and relearn the reality of the give and take of care-giving. When there are only two of you at sea, and one is tired or injured, the other comes to the rescue.

What about the care of children and parents who get left behind when the sailing woman goes to sea? That theme has yet to emerge for consideration, yet it seems a prominent topic of informal conversation I have had with women considering the sea way. Great concern is voiced about those left behind. In fact, many women leave the sea because the pull to children and parents is so great. The need to be close to family prevents many from venturing from the land.

Self care. Is the sea way an overt statement about self care and self love?

According to Heidegger (1953/1996), in order to relate to others, one must go beyond caring for them. Authentic care is more about freeing the individual to be transparent to her self so self-care can occur. As in the fourth task of transcendence to Avalon, the ability to provide self-care is the goal. Our interrelations in the world must be self-building, and the environments we choose promote self-care. An authentic alliance with others is sought to free the other for greater realization of self (Heidegger). Relationships are not about fostering dependence or dominance, but about the liberation of each person to seek their own freedom. So when Bateson (1990) talks about non-dominance, she is echoing Heidegger's (1953/1996) thoughts about authentic relationships.

Self-care is critical for women at sea; in order to sail a boat, all crew must be physically and mentally able. All crew are needed to propel the vessel and themselves on the planned journey. Perceived as valued crew, women learn a new respect for themselves. The need to care for themselves goes beyond their being the "property of

some man.” As stated in Avalon’s fourth task, the maiden stops rescuing others and focuses on her own needs in order to achieve transcendence (Bolen, 1994).

Does a boat at sea provide women with a creative way to be both cared for and to provide care to another? Can the intensity of the caring experience at sea, develop the caring person within? Women who question their caring skills and want to intensify their caring acts can realize their desires in the confined space of a boat.

Diverse Tasks--The Key to Creativity in a Composed Life

Is it normal to try to do it all, have it all or keep all the balls in the air at once? According to Bateson (1990), women are the masters of that art. Their nature is not to flee, but rather, to embrace multiple authentic tasks. It is the foundation of woman’s creativity-- what she gives back. Authentic tasks are not superficial or inauthentic (Heidegger, 1953/1996); they are performed for the good of others. Seeking authentic tasks of being that complement each other, is the creative approach of women to task completion. Tasks fulfilled through creative effort make up the threads in the fabric of their composed lives (Bateson, 1990).

Can a sea journey help women fulfill their need to balance tasks creatively and find complementarity between them? The tasks performed and the efficiency of task grouping are what the art of sailing is all about. Cooking tasks, mixed with electronic savvy, coupled with sailing skills, added to sewing challenges, mixed with social mingling, compounded with nursing functions blended with economic skill compose a typical day’s work at sea.

“Composed Life”

I am composing a life at sea
with a chapter on task diversity.
Multiplicity of tasks emerge
as the way to satisfy my creative urge.

I am composing a life at sea,
it makes good sense to me.
Come along and join the tribe
hop aboard on a sailboat ride.

See the balance emerge
as you acknowledge the urge.
Have and do it all with glee.
You can at sea, come along with me. (Schaefer, 2002)

Yes, women want to “do it all,” and they can if they learn how to balance.

Balance in a Composed Life

Bateson cautions us on the importance of achieving task balance. There is a need for a gradual build up of rhythm so tasks are accumulated slowly and authentic being is realized. There is a danger of taking on too much, too fast (Bateson, 1990). Bateson says women thrive on diversity; living on the edge, in the tension, is what stimulates the creative goddess. To escape the tension and live withdrawn from life, is to die, but can we take on too much? We must stay in the light and challenge ourselves in moderation; we must stay balanced players in life’s forces. Too many superficial tasks occurring at once, can cause a sailor to lose focus, and as Heidegger warns, they will lead them to the plunge “into the groundlessness and nothingness of inauthentic everydayness” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 167). An unfocused crew led by inauthentic being can lose its way at sea. Nature steps in with a warning that causes the crew to reconsider their situation.

Nature--a being of balance. Nature is more than a place of our “being-in” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 70). Nature, too, is a being, from which tension arises. Nature’s being can be unearthed by understanding the concepts that reveal it. Force, power, beauty, solitude and quietness all describe its presence. Once these concepts are mined, Nature’s being in time is revealed. So, when we discuss sailors’ relationships with Nature, we also must appreciate Nature’s being. It is the tension between Nature’s being and our being that allows for the peeling back and exposure of the essence, *Dasein*.

Heidegger (1953/1996) suggests we can come to know Nature’s being by what is missing from it. We can consider not only what is in the world but also what is absent. In other words, the absence of concepts reveals the being of Nature. Can the exploration of what is absent from our lives reveal the meaning of the lived?

A loss of balance remembered. I remember a weekend last summer; I went to my boat on Friday night to escape the confusion of work. My mind was compulsively returning to tension filled moments from the workday. I tried to clear my thoughts by performing routine tasks. I walked the dog, folded clothes, washed the deck and polished the bright work. Nothing worked; my mind was too active. By taking on too many superficial tasks in my work world, I had lost my balance. My creativity was spent, and I was exhausted.

Seeking my “righting moment,” I decided to take the boat out of the dock and sail her to a quiet lagoon. I cleared the dock, but not my mind. As the confusing chatter in my mind abounded, I set sail for the green buoy that marks the harbor

entrance. The mental chaos of superficial inauthentic being, caused me to lose focus and steer to the wrong side of the buoy. “At middle age the difference between enough and too much is very narrow and would have been easy to miss without guidance” (Bateson, 1990, p. 173). Nature intervened to guide me back to my center.

I can sail my boat with my eyes closed, but not with my mind closed. As the boat went aground on a muddy shoal, Nature’s action brought me back into balance with a “thump.” The boat was aground on the bottom of the seabed, and the tide was falling. That meant I would be stranded unable to move for several hours. The boat and I were in the hands of Nature, and we were experiencing a time of “forced idleness.” “Forced idleness” is a term coined by my husband who found himself sitting on our boat in an idle moment, unable to go out of doors because of a torrential rain. The term means that Nature has put a halt to our falling prey to inauthentic being. In other words, we have been forced to stop moving, sit down and reconsider life.

As I reflect on my days at sea, the moments of forced idleness are remembered as being my most creative. It is during these times of returning to balance, that I consider things, share stories, wander in my space, smile about my life and think ahead to the rising tide, next port and unrealized adventures. I look forward to life as Nature’s tide lifts me slowly from the earth.

Forced idleness comes easier at sea. Have you ever noticed the number of empty rocking chairs and hammocks that exist on the porches of land homes? They are symbolic of people wanting to sit, but find it impossible to stop moving. In an

anchorage, on the other hand, I see boat's cockpits filled with seated sailors looking back with a wave. Empty hammocks are hard to find on a boat; they are the most popular seats on the sea.

Self-Trust--Part of a Composed Life

By mid-life, most of us have learned that not all people or organizations can be trusted. Not that we think badly about them, but often people act in their own best interests and not ours. So, we tend to approach people in life with caution.

Today I am unwilling to work from a position of dependent trust and I believe the capacity to be self-supporting is a precondition to genuine partnership and responsible participation. At the same time, adult trust is a necessity of the human social life, when it is violated it is not easy to build again. (Bateson, 1990, p.189)

Self-trust and self-sufficiency are foundations to gaining authentic being. Do women who seek the sea life expect it to be an exercise in self-sufficiency as a way to avoid dependent trust? My mother, a sailor of 25 years, said of sailing, "There is no better place for kids to learn independence and being on their own than in a sailboat learning how to sail." Bateson (1990) encourages women to construct a new mode of self-preservation and commitment without dependency. Can the exercises and skills of sailing help women gain the confidence to do that? She suggests that in order to survive in a world where trust is illusive, a woman must construct a new mode of self-care. From that position her creativity can flow unencumbered by false dependencies.

In composing our life, we learn to take the ugly unfortunate occurrences and betrayals of trust and make them part of our overall broader design. We can not

ignore or deny their existence; instead, we exploit them for our own learning and make their energy work for us.

When I see ugliness on the horizon of my life, I draw from my experiences at sea. The storm clouds approach; I reduce sail because the sudden gusts of wind and torrential rains can over-fill the sails, cause a loss of equilibrium and push the boat onto its side in a “knockdown.” I look the storm in the eye and try to predict its direction, trying to avoid it if I can. I consider my options by gathering information from the radar, radio and fax machines. All my diverse skills are turned toward constructing a plan for survival. Sailors learn under duress how to prepare the boat to weather the storm. We challenge ourselves to get through it unscathed. We delight in the challenge, and we exalt in our knowledge being tested at sea. When the storm hits, the boat is rocked and knocked about. The driving rain blinds us, yet we see ahead with radar. We are pushed over, but we engage the engine and power into the wind. We are cold and wet, but we cover ourselves with foul weather gear. We are afraid, but we are mentally prepared and know how to wait for the storm to pass.

When the storm is over, we celebrate the positive aspects of the experience. Our boat has been washed with fresh water; all the sea salt has been removed. The wind is fresh and fills our sails as we speed in the direction of our next landfall. We have learned from the experience. It made us stronger, self-confident, self-sufficient and trusting in our preparedness. Thus, another of Avalon’s four tasks of transcendence is accomplished. Women gain power without losing their sense of self;

they become self-sufficient (Bolen, 1994). Wise women are born from self-trust and use this power to experience new beginnings.

New Beginnings

Women's strength comes from their ability to create new life and new beginnings. Only a woman can produce new life; it is our reproductive legacy. Therefore, it seems natural for us to apply that force within for our own renewal. We can transform ourselves at each spiral of our life, recompose who we are and begin again. We draw from our origins and history in order to move forward, "Reluctant to discard the past women have a willingness to look back for whatever may still fit" (Bateson, 1990, p. 226). Like a spiral we go back and forth in time ever moving forward, reinventing and rebeginning.

"Always"

"I will always have this,"
I say as I gaze out to sea.
Eyes closed, I still see the sea.
"I will always have this."
It is not the image I retain,
but the vision from my looking backward. (Schaefer, 2002)

Combining painful and joyful episodes builds our life's tapestry. Doing what women do best, we weave the threads of social interdependence and interrelationships to move forward. These woven threads make for social strength and ways of being. Our wisdom, constructed with others, is not based upon lofty aspirations but rather on survival skills, absolute (trusted) truth, our ability to balance, to learn, to shape, to adapt and fit into an environment beyond the safety of the shore (Bateson, 1990). I know no better place than a ship at sea to develop these ways.

We are spiraling through the sea world developing complementarity, mutual completion, enhancement and loving attention (Bateson, 1990). This is a journey of possibility, developing the self and healing the world each day--women at sea.

In his book, Going on Being, Epstein (2001) suggests that beginnings are born from approaching and entering the storm, the threshold to a new way of being.

At first I imagined that I was engaged in something akin to a battle, an ever-deepening, ever-opening confrontation with the way things are. Obstacles to my peace of mind were everywhere from the chattering of my thinking to the intensity of my emotions...I thought at first I had to conquer them all. But, as I began to appreciate how small a chance I had of winning such a battle, I shifted my approach. Confrontation was too confrontational; I needed something more akin to engagement; a deepening appreciation of reality, a commingling with it, a dissolving into, perhaps even a oneness with, this fabric of life such that the world began to appear, not as an obstacle, but as a vast tapestry, it began to seem increasingly ephemeral...(Epstein, 2001, p. 190)

At sea, women engage storms and learn ways of survival and self-sufficiency in non-confrontational ways. They are students of a renewed way of knowing, a way that requires commingling and “dissolving into” the tensions at hand. Surrounded by the almighty power of Nature, that are absorbed by and become part of the force. Each molecule of Being is reformed.

Teacher as Student

I came to the texts of Bateson and Bolen with preconceived ideas of how I interpreted my life, but they have shown me new ways of knowing. I used to think I was wise, but at mid-life, I realize that I still tumble and fall like an angry youngster competing for my place in the world. Mid-life is a time for intense learning for those open to the possibility. A student again, the educator continues to learn.

I thought my mid-life retirement from work was going to be a time of idle repose with no demands on my time. I now realize that a life of symmetrical existence without tension is empty and without purpose. It leads to depression and stagnation. I look forward to tensions as opportunities for renewal.

I thought I needed only my husband to make my life complete, but I have learned that he is not enough. Non-dependency and self-sufficiency is important to my identity. I learned also that experiencing the diversity of others is critical to happiness and creativity. Narrow views and exclusionary ways toward others destroy a creative life.

I thought I did not want responsibly for anyone but myself. Convinced of this I never had children. I have learned that care-taking is an honorable job for women, and women are good at it. Our ability to care for others should be celebrated as a strength we can give the world.

To understand is not enough; one must embrace and assimilate knowledge into our being in order to be changed by it. We must experience, live, try it out and practice this knowing. Like children we look for a proving ground to do this. A ship becomes a training ground for mid-life women who seek to learn the lessons inspired by Bateson. There, we apply our multi-tasking ability to new work and recognize that being tugged in many directions, doing “authentic” tasks, makes us creative, wise and worth seeking out. On a boat, we can reexamine ways to care for others, while caring for our selves, both acts essential to self-fulfillment. If we, as students of mid-life,

master these important tasks, perhaps we will become wise 21st century Renaissance women worthy of the title, teacher.

Mid-life student. To arrive at a point called mid-life, we are required to move between places of knowing. Moving is part of a woman's way in the world and it is a student's transitional work. McCollum (1990) names some of the journeys women experience as being "...the passage from home to studenthood, studenthood to workerhood, from single state to coupled state, from daughterhood to motherhood, from motherhood to grandmotherhood, from wifeness to widowhood, and then the passage from accustomed work into retirement" (1990, p. 21). The experience of these journeys shapes women as students, and women, in turn, shape the way the journey unfolds.

As students of mid-life, we require certain things from the world that enable us to travel to our next place of being. Murdock (1990) suggests that the mid-life journey is a process of learning when we reconnect with our feminine selves long left behind in the wake of life's chaotic currents. She reminds us that the journey, indeed, begins when a woman is called to it. "This 'call' is heard at no specific age, but occurs when the 'old self' no longer fits" (p. 4). For women at mid-life the call to learn may be initiated by divorce, career change, empty-nest, or a realization that she has no sense of self that she can call her own (Murdock, 1990).

The call to learn is a call to a quest.

It is a quest to fully embrace our feminine nature where we learn how to value ourselves as women and heal the deep wounds of the feminine. It is a very important inner journey toward being a fully integrated, balanced and whole human being. (Murdock, 1990, p. 3)

It is a call that is urgent and compelling. “We all try to avoid it, but at some point in our lives we journey to our depths. This is not a glamorous journey, but it invariably strengthens women and clarifies their sense of self” (p. 91). Women are moved to learn when they realize the need to reject old patriarchal models of being in the world and “find the parts of themselves that are their own” (Murdock, 1990, p. 7). As students of life in search of the feminine ways of being in the world, mid-life women are on a journey for the missing parts needed to construct a whole being.

Mid-life teacher. The call to experience the journey of developmental aging is a part of being human (Erikson, 1950). “The human personality, in principle, develops according to steps predetermined in the growing person’s readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of and to interact with a widening social radius” (p. 270). Erikson shares with us his notion of arriving at a mid-life stage called maturity, a place in human development where a person’s ego is fully integrated and the teacher emerges. He describes a person who has ego integration as one

...who in some way has taken care of things and people and has adapted himself [sic] to the triumphs and disappointments adherent to being, the originator of others...It is the acceptance of one’s one and only life cycle as something that had to be, and, that by necessity, permitted of no substitutions: it, thus, means a new and different love of one’s parents. It is a comradeship with the ordering ways of distant time and different pursuits. Although aware of the relativity of all the various life styles which have given meaning to human striving, the possessor of integrity is ready to defend the dignity of his own life style against all physical and economic threats. For he knows that an individual life is the accidental coincidence of but one life cycle with but one segment of history; and that for him all human integrity stands or falls with the one style of integrity of which he partakes. The style of integrity developed by his culture or civilization, thus, becomes the ‘patrimony of his soul’ the seal of the moral paternity of himself. In such final consolidation, death loses its sting. (Erikson, 1950 p. 268)

The call to maturity echoes the tasks that lead to Avalon (Bolen, 1994).

Maturity speaks to an acceptance of one's self, a reconsideration of human relationships, a prioritizing of pursuits, and putting one's life style above others. Not as a voice, but rather a vibration that echoes throughout our bodily being, the call to teach is the call of maturity. The mature, mid-life teacher knows she will be forever a student, but she also knows it is time to reconsider her responsibility to guide future generations. As mature women of mid-life, they blaze the trail for others who look to their life maps for direction and knowledge.

Can the sea be a classroom for mid-life students like me who want to be better teachers and mentors? The question of what is learned at sea is answered by Bryson.

Throughout this whole process of redirection, I have asked the question, "Are we running away from or going toward something?" The dream probably originally began as an escape, but both of us have always been drawn to the water and we always knew we would end up somewhere on or around the ocean. So I would like to think we are moving toward something that we have always loved; something that provides a tremendous challenge and a continuing education. Operating a sailboat is complicated. There is so much to learn. It has been like going back to school again; new vocabulary words, new systems to operate—the GPS (global positioning system), radar, the single side band radio... We are always reading and studying material in preparation for our next island or passage. Each island is an education in itself with its customs, culture, history, geography, foods and language. (personal journal, Sept 14, 1992)

She, too, realizes that retirement is not about idleness; her description of day to day life is hardly idle. It is active and stimulating, a classroom afloat. Callahan describes his classroom at sea:

...my work place, my playground, and my home. It has offered me a pathway to more disciplines that I can ever master. Oceanography, aerodynamics, astronomy, and common-sense problem solving are essential parts of sailing; hydrodynamics, physics, engineering, and intuitive extrapolation are essential

to boat design; craftsmanship, metallurgy, forestry, and plastic's technology are ingredients of boat building. I am a jack-of-all trades who has a passion for exploration. (Callahan, 1986, p. xiii)

Bryson and Callahan speak about a transformation of character through knowledge, but it is not the day to day sailing activities alone that change a person. It is the reflective work, "intuitive extrapolation," coupled with an open acknowledgement that "more is going on here than just academic leaning" that renews the person. Authentic being is possible if the participants are aware of the transformative powers of their experiences at sea, and they are open to the possibility of allowing the change to occur.

Bateson (1994) considers life education as an endless string threaded through all layers of our experience; "Pleasure and survival are linked by learning" (p. 10). She suggests we consider learning the most basic of human adaptive processes, and our capacity to enjoy and value one experience over another is how we adapt and change our ways of knowing (1994). We compose layers of learning experiences that build as our collection grows. Our current knowledge is built on past learning, creating layers of knowledge which strengthen our foundation. "It often becomes necessary to find a prior wisdom, an earlier layer of learning, to strip off some distorting overlay and combine the recent with the old" (Bateson, 1994, p. 57). Sailing uses the lessons of the young and combines them with the sophisticated knowledge of the adult. All we have ever known is of use to us at sea. The integration, "intuitive extrapolation" (Callahan, 1986, p. xiii) of all our life's skills is realized. How can we use our life of learning to reveal our inner layer, the spiritual

core, alluded to by Lawlor? The core is the place of the soul (Lawlor, 1997); this is where we want to go. This is the place of Being and our boat can get us there.

A Boat at Sea --Training Grounds to Enlightenment

Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. Simply messing...about in boats - or with boats... In or out of 'em it doesn't matter. Nothing seems really to matter that's the charm of it. Whether you get away, or whether you don't; whether you arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when you've done it, there's always something else to do, and you can do it if you like, but you'd much better not. (Grahame, 1953, p. 6)

The boat becomes a place where you learn to let go, to locate your center and develop a “much better not” do anything way about you. The quiet lonely road to self-discovery and self-love awaits the mid-life seeker. The way to the “inside,” reveals a place where I can look at the “outside.” It is a safe place supported by the goddess within, who lives below decks on my sailboat. A boat at sea teaches me a responsible “letting go” way of being. Firm on the deck, I am ready to leap, fly, and levitate with glee. Like the Laughing Buddha who, when he found the highest level of happiness, was able to float above the earth. Moitessier, a famous French sailor, describes his joy of being at sea on a sailboat. “I am terrifically happy. I feel so happy, so much at peace with the entire universe, that I am laughing and laughing as I go on deck” (Noble & Hogbin, 2001, p. 137).

“Sail Away”

Sail away, I float on happiness.
Sail away, I laugh all the way.
Sail away, pain becomes energy.

Sail away, on a pathless sea.
Sail away, my soul I shall see. (Schaefer, 2002)

A ship is a floating classroom, a space to process questions and answers. Let us construct that learning space in a way that appeals to a mid-life learner. Consider it as a transcendental training ground. It is a place to levitate crew to new levels of understanding, thus, enhancing their gifts to the world. A ship at sea fosters wisdom and insight if we use it as a place to consider the ways of enlightened others.

Things the Buddha Teaches

“Rather than going more deeply into our problems, Buddhism teaches us how to disentangle our minds from them” (Epstein, 2001, p. 6). Normally, Buddhism is not a practice that I would have considered as the way to understanding how sailing can be a woman’s training ground to enlightenment. Having considered the Buddhist ways, however, I see a new way of thinking about sailing. Buddhism offers people an opportunity to “see themselves as they truly are” (Epstein, 2001, p. 7). Sailing does the same.

The foundation of Buddhism helps individuals find the freedom that exists within them, but is obscured by their clinging to daily coping mechanisms (Epstein, 2001):

...for it is those learned (coping) strategies, necessary as they might have been in childhood, that choke off or obscure an inherent openness or creativity. Recovery of spirit involves learning how to restrain those very coping strategies that helped us to survive. (Epstein, 2001, p. 40)

The Buddha helps us unlearn the old ways and reminds us that looking is the key to recovering our spirit and finding a more authentic way of being--a truer self.

Looking for and finding the truer self, is the essence of the mid-life search for soul. He says learning to look rather than react is the key to finding our way. How does sailing help us look first and not just react to life? Is sailing a looking experience? If so, then what are we looking for? Buddha says we are looking for our spirit.

Live in the moment. We must live in the moment if we want to find our spirit. Moment-to-moment living is an enlightened state. It means one has

a stream of unimpeded awareness ever evolving yet with continuity, uniqueness and integrity. It carries with it the sense of the unending meeting places of interpersonal experiences and convergences that are not blocked by a reactive or contracted ego. (Epstein, 2001, p. 31)

“Live in the Moment”

There is no better place than here.
 There is no better time than now.
 The person in front of you
 is the most important person in the world.
 They are your opportunity to talk with god.
 Use this moment to listen, bend and transcend.
 Use sailing to comprehend. (Schaefer, 2002)

The boat is a training ground for moment-to-moment living. The condition sought after is experiencing time at a stand still, when all you can do is hang in the moment. This is the goal of extreme play. It is here that we stop the clock and live a “forever” second. It is the frozen frame of a movie, where motion and speech stop, and we experience eternity in a blink of an eye. Like a boat ascending a giant wave and teetering on the brink of a sleigh ride down its crest, we behold the essence of life in that pregnant moment. Our hands sweat and our hearts throb; and we have never been so in touch--so in the moment. Life explodes; we dissolve and are absorbed into eternity. Let the learning begin!

A disciplined mind. “A disciplined mind is the road to Nirvana” (Epstein, 2001, p. 51). Can life on a boat help discipline the mind through the repeated rituals performed daily at sea? Cleary’s (1995) translation of the Dhammapada, The Sayings of Buddha, helps us understand the relationship between rituals, mind control and enlightenment. The Buddha’s teachings tell us that the mind needs to be stabilized in order to sustain cognition of truth. Stabilization is cultivated by watchfully guarding the mind to keep it from becoming fragmented by random thoughts. Disciplined rituals help with this process. He lists ten concepts that help us understand mind control.

1. The mind is restless, unsteady, hard to guard, hard to control. The wise one makes it straight, like a fletcher straightens an arrow.
2. Like a fish out of water, cast on dry ground, this mind flops around trying to escape the realm of bedevilment.
3. The mind is mercurial, hard to restrain, alighting where it wishes, it is good to master this mind; a disciplined mind brings happiness.
4. Let the wise one watch over the mind, so hard to perceive, so artful, alighting where it wishes; a watchfully protected mind brings happiness.
5. The mind travels afar, acts alone, is incorporeal, and haunts a cave; those who will control it escape the bonds of bedevilment.
6. For the wakeful one whose mind is unimpassioned, whose thoughts are undisturbed, who has given up both virtue and sin, there is no fear.
7. Knowing the body to be like a water pitcher, making the mind like a citadel, fighting bedevilment with the weapon of insight. Guard what you have won, without attachment to it.
8. The body, alas, will soon lie on the ground, without consciousness, abandoned like a useless piece of rotten wood.
9. Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, and whatever the hateful may do to the hateful, the mind with a warped intent does even worse than that.
10. What not even a mother, a father, or any other relative will do, a rightly directed mind does do, even better. (Cleary, 1995, pp. 16-18)

Cleary’s translation helps us understand the fundamental concepts of Buddhism. That is, the mind is connected to the body, and as a result, can be

influenced negatively by the body's narrow worldview. Total freedom is obtained when one is capable of detaching oneself from both good and evil and abandoning reactive impulses altogether. Ordinary people fear harm from others without giving equal consideration to how much they harm themselves. Further, ordinary people depend on others for their well being without giving equal consideration to what they need to do or should be doing for themselves. Compassion for others is useless if you cannot first master your own life (Cleary, 1995). The tasks of Avalon testify to this as women begin to consider the self over others.

Olton (2002) knows what a wandering mind can do to the safety of a vessel when entering a harbor. Her previously cited description of a docking ritual shows how she and her mate have trained their mind to achieve a level of watchfulness that keeps them safe. Training the mind through ritualistic patterning on a ship can focus reactive energies into new ways of being and new ways of soul discovery.

The Buddha's classroom--a boat. The boat is a training ground in an uncertain environment, and it is here we can reflect on Buddha's ways. The Buddha taught us to have the "Right Thought," which does not mean how to be clever, but rather, how to tolerate uncertainty (Epstein, 2001). How does a ship at sea help us tolerate and live with uncertainty? Clearly there are few more uncertain environments than living in the midst of the sea and wind. Living under Nature's umbrella, we float and wait for the next surprise.

To achieve the "Right Thought," the Buddha teaches us to let go of identity and possessions. If we do, we will realize freedom that comes from balancing effort

with surrender (Epstein, 2001). What better place to practice this than on a boat where one has limited possessions due to the constraints of space? When we move on board a boat, land possessions are left behind. At sea my entire wardrobe consists of five pair of shorts, seven T-shirts, one pair of pants, two baseball hats and a suit of foul weather gear. This is quite a reduction compared to my land garb.

Buddha says that, in addition to “Rightful Thought,” one must have mindfulness in order to reach enlightenment. Mindfulness is

...the ability to note moment to moment what is happening without holding on to it and without pushing it away... Carefully noting to oneself whatever was most prominent in one’s experience through the construction of what seems to me a somewhat artificial witness or third party in the mind. (Epstein, 2001, p. 76)

Life at sea requires mindfulness and being in the present to ensure the safe and smooth running of the ship. Lapses in focus, by holding a thought too long or ignoring a thought altogether, can be disastrous. Lapses in focus can cause forgotten lines to fall into the sea and foul the engine’s prop. Unattended halyards that get trapped in the rigging can hinder one’s ability to shorten sail. A tiller left unsecured can damage the steering or steer you off course. The price for a wandering mind is high. Life at sea makes one mindful.

A mindful state is the springboard to yet another level of being, the attainment of anatta or “no self.” It is the “I much better not” (Grahame, 1953, p. 6) do anything state. It is the training in not holding on and learning acceptance. Buddha tells us to seek freedom from within and feel the pleasure of being rather than doing or being done to (Epstein, 2001). I have yet to experience that level, but I am still of the land.

How Sailing Leads to Enlightenment

What about this sea life recovers our capacity for joy and ultimately leads to our enlightenment? Clearing our minds of chatter and letting go of old ways of reacting, changes who we are. Quieting the mind's chaotic patterns leads to an experience of being and inner peace (Epstein, 2001). I can think of no better way to quiet the mind, than hour after hour of rhythmic sailing on a boat pointed to a vast endless horizon. With our minds clear, yet controlled, we are "going on being." A sense of inherent "all rightness," normality and aliveness comes into focus. A confidence is created that says no matter how terrible a life situation may be it can be survived. We create a power from just "showing up" (Epstein, 2001, p. 147). How simple these concepts: the power of just "showing up," just being in place or just being self. Can a ship at sea raise its crew to that place of power? No environment other than the most simple and humble can bring home a message of power from just being in place. Humble places, such as boats, carve away the unnecessary fat of life and reduce day-to-day activities to acts of survival and basic pleasures. Yes, sailing is definitely a way to enlightenment, and on some level, all sailing women know it.

Clearing the mind. How do we remove barriers to our "going on being"? How can life on a boat moving across the earth keep us in the immediate moment of experience? Epstein describes how he moved to a new way of thinking about being. He examined old defense mechanisms that caused his mind to chatter, and he acknowledged why they existed. He faced himself and saw beyond the self; he reached his heart. "The mind creates the abyss and the heart crosses it" (Epstein,

2001, p. 157). From then on, “All of my pursuits of knowledge and understanding had to be centered in my heart” (Epstein, 2001, p. 161). Knowing the way of the heart frees us from misconstrued ideas built on old tired defenses. Is life at sea a “heart felt” journey? Is sailing a journey of the heart?

To learn how to wait and be patient even when surrounded by a painful situation is the cornerstone of Buddha’s teaching. My husband, Tom, exemplifies this mind clearing way. When on his boat he usually has three electrical “fixing up” projects going on at once. When frustrated with one project, he jumps to the other. He waits and clears his mind from the failed project while completing another. Later, he returns to the failed project with fresh eyes and success. Life at sea has taught him to focus, clear his mind and stay in the moment to keep going forward. Tom is a natural sailing Buddha.

How do I know that I am “There”? Does the journey of women at mid-life have an end point? In other words, how do we know the journey is over? Does it ever end? Bolen (1994) suggests that “The journey ends with integration of ego and consciousness, between the self and the soul” (p. 163). Is that the way some women return to the land? They have integrated the ego (land ways) with the consciousness (sea ways).

Two accounts of sailors, who ended their sailing careers, provide insight to these questions. Francis had a long illustrious sailing career. She sailed single handed in a race across the Atlantic in the 1970’s.

She faced the realities of this grueling race, the sheer misery of most of the voyage; the dripping damp, the terrible noise of the gales, the eternal

fog...coupled with loneliness, icebergs, 55-knot winds and 35-foot waves...
 'I was aware of what I was – a small person in the middle of a large ocean.
 And it was a cold and lonely feeling.'...She would not be repeating the
 experience. (Noble & Hogbin, 2001, p. 27)

She said she achieved what she had set out to accomplish in sailing. Her words speak to a sense of completion of having reached her Avalon. "This is what I came to find and sail through; this beautiful, powerful and magnificent ocean. As I watched, I felt no fear, only simple admiration" (Noble & Hogbin, 2001, p. 28). For her there was no looking back and she ended her career in sailing content to let her "recollections fade with time" (p. 28). She had touched Nature and, in turn, it has forever changed her.

The account of a male sailor who came to land too soon reads as follows,

Many cruisers sell their charts when they return, looking to recoup a few cents on the dollar. Our charts are my personal Dead Sea scrolls, a fragile record that ties us to a past that is already seen more dimly. These charts are precious beyond measure. Perhaps this is the source of my anxiety. Our trip already seems a dream, its reality fading beneath the weight of our return to normality. Can we ever be truly "normal" again? Not in this lifetime. Not if we can help it. (Nicholson, 2002, p. 15)

His account of returning home sounds filled with regret of having to return to the day to dayness. His anxiety over a struggle not to be "normal" rings out. He left the sea too soon. He failed to reach his Ithaka and now must find it another way. Perhaps he will return to the sea.

"There"

How do I get "There" from here?
 How do I stay in the present?
 How do I remain open?
 How do I quiet the mind?
 How do I gain enlightenment?
 How do I know I am there?

I get there with music, singing, dancing and sailing.
 I get there by reaching with the heart, barriers down.
 I get there by telling the voices to “go away.”
 I get there by allowing the tensions to occur and not reacting to them.

Am I “There” yet?
 Not if you have to ask. (Schaefer, 2002)

I will know I am “There” when the smile in my mind never leaves me and I have achieved an “oceanic feeling.” This feeling described by Buddha is one of rapture and joy. It means we have learned how to focus and experience “an intense interest in the object of awareness” (Epstein, 2001, p. 175). Applied to real life at sea, the “oceanic feeling” is experienced by the captain of a ship as she fixes her gaze on objects in the distant horizon. Islands, buoys, ships hold her gaze for hours. The objects get larger or smaller as she focuses intently on them for what seems to be a forever time. She is in the moment. Time stops and is meaningless; all that exists is the relationship with the object. Eventually, she passes it and it disappears behind her. The hours of focused intensity hold the “alert one” in a gaze that will not release. That is what puts a smile in my mind -- hours of being with my self focusing my gaze on distances. I am lost and found in the “oceanic feeling.”

The sailor becomes a “sail-a.” A saila is word I created that means: *a female who is attracted to boats as a means of travel across bodies of water. The sea being the preferred environment to live, she adapts her lived ways to a water environment and uses it to gain oceanic feelings.* I seek fellow sailas to further this research. Sea sisters in conversation will reveal the truths of my turning. My turning to phenomenology is a truth seeking way to uncover the experiences of like creatures as

we set sail on a mid-life journey. A purposefully selected common environment lends itself to the deeper understanding of the journey of self-selected beings.

Conversations between friends in commonality expose themes of living, that when commingled, create a composition of lived lives. Our shared lives reveal the invisible and wordless ways of a languageless understanding of the mid-life journey. The ways to use these conversations to mine and reveal the essence and languageless place of meaning is outlined in Chapter Three. In that chapter, phenomenological methodology applied to the phenomenon of mid-life women choosing the sea way is described by this *saila*.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL GROUNDING

My Venture to Meaning

To venture causes anxiety and tension, but not to venture is to lose oneself forever (Kierkegaard, 1980). So, our journey begins at a point of anxiety and tension: mid-life. Kierkegaard reminds us these anxious times yield the freedom necessary for truth seeking. Truths unearthed and shared through scholarly research, guide self and others on their life journeys. This chapter provides an articulation of how I have come to understand phenomenological methodology and the way in which it leads to the exposure of truths found in lived experience. Mining the meaning of lived experiences, is the purpose of phenomenological research. “Research is a personal experience...we learned that viewing research in the context of lives yields a richer understanding of how research evolves, and how researchers develop” (Neumann & Peterson, 1997, p. 3). It is this experience that yields meaning for me as well as those who partake in it. My research is an expression of me. The question is mine.

My question, **“What is the lived experience of mid-life women who have chosen the sea way as sailor?”**, resonates with who I am in my life journey. I live this question; I embody it. I seek a meaningful answer, knowing it is through the search that meaning unfolds, for others as well as me. We wander in this place we call earth in search of purpose that exists beyond the every day.

I need a plan to venture forth in my search for meaning. To wander aimlessly leads nowhere. To search purposely is focused self love. My plan requires consideration of certain facts in my life, known elements of myself that, when opened

up, may lead to an expanded view of where next to venture. At age 51, I am considered a mid-life woman. The sea is my proposed home. On April 30, 2003, I began living on a boat, and, on July 1, 2003, I began sailing across oceans. I seek the essence of the sailing way at mid-life by uncovering the layers of living that brought those of us making this choice to this way. Time constructs the layers and I will use it to reflect upon the past, present, and future places of our journeys. Intrinsic perceptions formed our knowing, and it is the unsaid pre-reflective moments of living that shaped meaning for us. It is this meaning to which I will give voice, through hermeneutic phenomenology.

Mid-life--A Re-starting Place

Mid-life is tension-filled. It is the crossing-over time from youth to aged. It is a time of pause and reflection. For many, it is a time of chaos brought on by family changes. Children become young adults, and aging parents return to child-like ways. Mid-life is the fulcrum's teetering point where both ends of the lifespan are precariously balanced, and we get caught in the middle, caretakers for the young and old. Women are the mid-life jugglers who keep all balls in the air. Our juggling act tires us, makes us over-worked and reflective. We wonder, "What is next? When is it my turn?" Phenomenology as a research methodology allows for the exploration of tensions from this moment in time. To venture into the realm of tension is to find ourselves--to find the essences of self and to answer, "What is in it for me?" To realize the gain from this inquiry will ease and rephrase anxious moments, transforming them into opportunities for transcendence. We turn on a light for the

world. We transform “other persons’ ‘irrational’, ‘annoying’ actions into rational, sensible, understandable ones” (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1984, p. 15). In effect, as phenomenologists, we seek to make things better for those who are affected by the insights revealed.

Sailing--Venturing into the Sea Way

Sailing a boat on open water is an activity of tension-filled moments. It is a way of extremes with sunny days, stormy seas, quiet hours of endless gliding and days of raging wind and weather. It tests your knowledge, skills, adaptability, flexibility, sense of humor, and sense of wonder. It makes you watchful and wise.

Sailing is a teetering way of life where women balance their land legs with seaways. The new ways of existing in this tension filled environment, shape you into “anotherness.” The sail calls us and as women in mid-life, we venture to the sea and its anxious ways. We use this experience to expose our “self.” As each tension-filled sailing episode unveils the essence of the self, we grasp for it to hold near. We grasp for it because we have been looking for it so long. We hold it close because we forgot what it felt like and are afraid we will not realize it again. Life’s meanings are invisible and heart felt; we, as researchers, have to use language to capture and express that meaning for others.

Mid-life and sailing are mighty, tension-filled and truth-yielding forces, indeed. Together, they form the underpinning for the meaning that lives beneath the voice of my phenomenological research question: **“What is the lived experience of mid-life women who have chosen the sea way as sailor?”**

Being--Meaning Sought

Revealing the essence of Being through the everyday is expressed in the writings of Heidegger (1953/1996). Through his words, we appreciate the possibility of peeling back the lived layers of daily life to expose meaning. Through phenomenological research, we consider the everyday lived ways of mid-life women at sea. Being is revealed through the opening up of deliberate everyday events of sailing; the unfolding lays bare meaning. Our unearthing exposes the threads of true meaning that have been covered over with events found in the conundrum of mid-life living.

“Being is the most universal and the emptiest concept. As such, it resists every attempt at definition” (Heidegger 1953/1996, p. 1). That challenge made, my ontological focus in the exploration of mid-life women turning to sea ways warrants attention.

All ontology, no matter how rich and tightly knit the categories it has at its disposal, remains fundamentally blind and perverts its inner most intent if it has not previously clarified the meaning of being sufficiently and grasped this clarification as its fundamental task. (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 9)

I choose phenomenology because I can participate in unfolding a phenomenon that I also realize. In fact, it is required that I “clarify the meaning of being sufficiently and grasp this clarification as my fundamental task” (p. 9). I am a mid-life woman, and I seek life on a boat at sea. How can this phenomenon help me name meaning for myself and for others who choose the sailing way?

Everything we talk about, understand and relate to is Being (Heidegger, 1953/1996). In order to formulate the questions of the day, phenomenological

researchers undertake to grasp fully the meaning of Being in the world--*Dasein*. They learn the way of the concept in order to unearth it in others' lived ways. "The explicit and lucid formulation of the question of the meaning of Being requires a prior suitable explanation of *Dasein* with regard to its being" (Heidegger, p. 6). This in no way implies that *Dasein's* meaning is drawn from that person. *Dasein* must be realized in the day to day worlds of its beings. *Dasein* is not the historical accounting of someone's life, but, rather, the conceptualization of the experience of living.

In understanding *Dasein*, we need to realize the "everyday" way about it. It is not a focus of unusual events or the crisis and chaos of a unique moment in time; it is about everyday occurrences of the lived. "By looking at the fundamental constitution of the everyday of *Dasein*, we shall bring out in a preparatory way the Being of this being" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 15).

Time. Time plays a role in understanding *Dasein*. What we seek is an understanding not of the unique, once-in-a lifetime meaning of Being in time, but rather, the old, repeated, everyday events so as to comprehend the possibilities prepared by the many who have gone before us (Heidegger, 1953/1996). Said again through metaphor, I am not interested in unearthing meaning from an extreme event, such as the demasting of a sailboat that left the boat's inhabitants floating atop the ocean for 30 days waiting for rescue. Rather, I seek the meaning found in the simple and routine ways of sea life. Hoisting a sail, coiling a rope, and watching a sunset are the day to day events of the sea way that carry with them a bounty of meaning. The

“livedness” (Heidegger, 1953/1996) of these ways will yield meaning as we peel them back and expose each layer.

The durability of *Dasein* rises above extreme times--it is a constant forever with no start or stop. It is the essence of the human, the universal constant that we seek. I see the themes of *Dasein*; they are all around me--apparent in everyday life. Like old friends, their familiar ways comfort and elicit forgotten memories rich with meaning. I have experienced the timeless truths of *Dasein*'s melodies, and because of them, I am united with others who share the song.

Perception. Perception is the seeing eye of phenomenological inquiry, “not as a simple sensorial function that would explain the others but as the archetype of the originating encounter imitated and renewed in the encounter with the past, the imaginary, the ideas” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 158). Our perceptions are “principles of the actual” (p. 152) and are as unique as each of us. Perceptions are a way of knowing, shaped by our history and past life; no other can possess our unique way of receiving and processing information. Thus, it creates meaning for each in a unique way. It enters us and becomes our soul, our guide and our rememberings. We shape our ideas about the world from them. Ideas can be shared, compared and changed, but perceptions never change; they are crystallized images frozen in time. They are housed in the memory banks of our mind. It matters not if they are accurate renditions; accurate to whom? Accuracy is a subjective appraisal; it is not part of perception's way. Perceptions are sense specific, person unique and non-negotiable. They are whatever the sayers say they are. “It is our experience that we address

ourselves--we choose no interlocutor less compromising than the whole of what is for us" (Merleau-Ponty, p. 159).

We see nothing visibly without having first laid the ground work for our knowing it. We must first perceive in order to see. "The flesh is the dehiscence of the seeing into the visible and of the visible into the seeing" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p.153). Perception is born when there is a reversibility of the inner knowing and the object. At this point the two acts cross and perception is known.

Leaving the Dock of Scientific Methods

How different phenomenology's approach to human understanding, than that of the scientific ways of knowing taught in my nursing education. Nursing is a science formulated on a medical model of finding cures for diseases and pathology. Though a nurse's role is a caring one, it is still driven by the scientific principles of medical research. After 25 years of this approach, I turn my back on its narrow limitations to find out what I believe to be of more importance to a woman's survival on earth, her appreciation of the moment.

I am turning to phenomenology as a widening, opening way of understanding my world. Technical quantitative analysis, though crucial to the medical management of a patient, does not hold enough truth for me. It only tells one side of the story--the physical. A depth of meaning is missing if all we desire from life is a healthy body. Reduction of the life experience in this way does not capture the essence of knowing that I insist on having. I depart from the technical and do not want to train in its ways any longer. I am suffocating from the technical focus; though so important to the

physical cure, it is killing my soul. I need to visit the other side of human life and find another way to view the world and my place in it. Mid-life is the time I have chosen to do this work. Wounded, I crawl into my ship to be with others living a non-technical way.

Mid-life living on a boat at sea, speaks to me as a way to experience “authentic” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 40) being. Sailing has shown me ways to unblock the way to my heart. After living the technical day to day of “inauthentic” (Heidegger, 1953/1996) ways, I found myself holding my breath and gasping for air; sailing rescued me, and helped me breathe again. Out and in, and out and in, the moving sea air filled my lungs. No longer of the flesh, I saw a new authentic way with meaning and redefined purpose. I do not know why sailing has called me, but I want to find out the meaning of that call. In doing so, I will no longer have to hold my breath to live. In turn, I will call others to this authentic path and we will breathe with each other.

Reduction’s limitations. Solving a problem by dissecting it into parts is the way of science; the act of reduction trivializes experience through explanation. The knowledge revealed through phenomenological research is a non-reducing way of textual opening. Through non-reducing exposures, themes found in conversation illuminate life’s ways. The themes discovered are like boats on the sea floating, waiting to be carried forward to a place of meaning making, somewhere found in our horizontal horizons.

Reductionist themes expose horizons that represent a passage to the absolute --the vertical. Being is progressive and yields results, but it remains incomplete if it is reduced to “vertical horizons” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 178). Up and down ways diminish to a central axis; horizontal views are expansive and broadening and continually unfolding.

Tellings found in conversations request no solution. To try to fix or remedy the story stops the unfolding and causes us to miss its intricacies. Rather, the themes ask to be peeled back and further opened up in order to reveal their meaning. “Better that we probe but not solve the mysteries of conflict, of intimacy and distance, power and powerlessness, authority and madness, fate and free will that we chance diminishing them” (Metzger, 1992, p. 102).

To reduce is a technical way of knowing. Rogers (1970) was a nursing theorist whose life work revolved around the “open” approach to human science research. A pioneer of nursing science, she identified the dangers of reductionism. The whole of a person can not be understood when “it is reduced to its particulars” (p. 44). She states that persons are not machines and can not be understood by the sum of their components. Life can not be understood as a reduction to systems, organs, and cells. “The life process is a dynamic course which is continuous, creative, evolutionary and uncertain” (p. 46). She continues, “As remarkable as are the science and technology that daily cross new frontiers, they are not nearly so remarkable as the expansion of man’s [sic] thought and emotions which make the crossing possible” (p. 70).

So, to reduce is not enough in our understanding of life. We need to dream of and experience life's possibilities, and, to do this, we must acknowledge the lived. Lived lives are the lights that illuminate the darkness and show us possibilities. Technical knowing gained through reduction means nothing, if application to lived ways has not occurred; a woman can not find her way unless the expansion of her thoughts illuminates her path. The life process requires more than the technical way.

A wandering I go with Rogers. My personal journey through the life world has had many stopping-off places. My nursing education was like being on a river flowing through a technical world, taking an occasional side trip up a stream of interest. A wandering toward embracing Rogerian Theory into my nursing practice was one such trip. Exposure to this theory was part of my graduate education in the field of nursing administration. Roger's Theory of Unitary Man [sic] (1970) became my first academic exposure to a turning to "another way" of being. Non-reductionist thinking was introduced, and I began to see personhood as, "...a unified whole possessing...integrity and manifesting characteristics that are more than and different from the sum of...parts" (p. 34). Her theories did not reduce entities, but expanded how we thought about them--as open field phenomena. That means our integrity and uniqueness can not be reduced because that being is in a state of constant renewal. In fact, to be understood, persons must be viewed with a larger more open approach. An open field approach appreciates persons as living in an environmental field inhabited my millions of other entities, and they all are part of each other--all their fields interact. So, understanding personhood in the context of the "Theory of Unitary Man"

is to see persons as whole beings that are continually opening, unfolding and mixing with elements of their chosen world.

Roger's theories echo with the sounds of Merleau-Ponty's (1964/1968) words, "We situate ourselves in ourselves and in the things, in ourselves and in the other, at the point where, by a sort of chiasm, we become the others and we become the world" (p. 160). We are in the world and the world is in us. We are each part of each other. Together at the chiasm, we wander within our invisible space. We "co-function ... as one unique body" (p. 215). We exchange with the world and Nature. Our phenomenological selves exchange with our objective bodies. "What begins as a thing, ends as consciousness of the thing, and what begins as a 'state of consciousness' ends as a thing" (p. 215). Back and forth between the tangible and the visible, we exist in the world; our bodies are mere objects in the equation of being alive. Our body is a receptacle and delivery agent for intersecting with others and objects, and perhaps, that is what it means to be alive. To live is to exchange and interact with all that is around us; then, to talk about it, to suck it in and breathe it out --out loud. It is this theoretical way of thinking, spawned by Martha Rogers (1970) that serves as my academic underpinning; it has laid the ground work for my readiness to accept a unique approach, different from my technical ways, to uncovering truths.

Technical ways inform non-technical being. I can not turn away from the technical ways of my scientific upbringing, but phenomenological methodology brings me to reconsider my technical view. The technical lends itself to the non-

technical as it “unlocks and exposes” (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 15) with the intent of “furthering something else” (p. 15). Heidegger (1954/1977) concurs that technical thinking requires skill, but it is not reflective enough to bring being to a new way of knowing. The skill of the technical thinking coupled with “...reflection bring us to our place of sojourning” (Heidegger, 1954/1977, pp. 180-181).

The energy monitor of a boat is a technical piece of equipment that tells a sailor how much energy is stored in a boat’s batteries; yet, language of the non-technical is used to describe what it does. The measured energy levels are said to “float” when there is no more room for energy to enter the battery cells. The “float level” remains until more energy is used. When the battery is being charged, the energy monitor registers an “absorbing” stage. “Float” and “absorb” are descriptive terms that can lead us beyond a technical understanding to a deeper appreciation of the boat’s being. The battery is reconsidered as the vessel’s source, center, or soul. In an effort to take us to somewhere else, it floats within us as it absorbs the invisible energies of the world. If we use the power of phenomenological reconsideration, life’s technical ways can deepen our understanding of being in the world.

Heidegger (1953/1996) reminds us that even the most technical way of being, such as, the practice of nursing or hospital management, requires a “working out” (1953/1996, p. 328) of the problem at hand. He suggests that we as mere mortals can not really know the boundary between the theoretical and non-theoretical. Thus, we must use our intuition to guide us in the interpretation of knowledge. “In accordance with the priority of ‘seeing,’ the demonstration of the existential genesis of science

will have to start out by characterizing the circumspection that guides ‘practical’ taking care of things” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 328). When praxis’s structure is removed, the possibilities of technical theory emerge. It is this peeling away of praxis that reveals the “...quality of a more precise kind of circumspection, such as ‘inspecting,’ checking what has been attained...” (1953/1996, p. 327). This checking is the art of science. As human expression and thoughtful insight are applied to that which is found out (Heidegger, 1953/1996), its intuitive and expressive nature brings us to meaning. Heidegger (1953/1996) suggests, in fact, that scientific findings are influenced by the being of the scientist as she uses her voice to express the findings of the technical.

Unaware that the technical ways of living are nurtured by the non-technical, uninformed women become disoriented and lost as they go through the perfunctory motions of a mechanized existence. It is as if they suffocate in the endless “plunge” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 166) to “inauthentic” (1953/1996, p. 119) ways of living. The call to reconsider our way of being in the world comes when we are ready to listen. When heard with phenomenological ears, women come to know that full participation in life requires both a technical and non-technical view. Embracing the technical as a way to the non-technical, women discover the treasures lying buried along mid-life’s path.

Phenomenology--A Search for Buried Treasure

As I search for the buried treasure, meaning that lies in the groundedness of a woman sailor’s lived ways, I realize I need a map to show me the way. Van Manen

(1990) is a phenomenological map maker and has written about ways to find the buried treasure that phenomenological researchers seek.

Phenomenology is a “theory of the unique” (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). It belongs in the school of the life world, and its curriculum reveals being or becoming (van Manen, 1990). It encourages attention to detail and the seemingly less trivial aspects of life, and makes us painfully aware of the consequential in the seemingly inconsequential. It reminds us of the significance in what we take for granted. It is a call to say something important; it is a way to bypass academic chatter and express the essence of the discovered (van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology had its beginnings in the mid 1800s. Over the years, persons have used phenomenological renderings in art, philosophy, poetry and music to unite humanity with “the ground of their lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). It is in this grounding that phenomenology found its place as being a methodology for research which, at each pre-reflective moment in time, gains insight to the world. The pre-reflective moment is one that has not yet been classified, taxonomized or conceptualized. It is the “being in” point of the experience, a pre-linguaged moment. Such moments are retrospective pre-reflections that are captured in memory, pictures, music and other expressions of the soul. As it is impossible to consider the pre-reflection of a present moment of living, one can only look back and consider a pre-reflective moment lived. Such remembering, then, involves a retrospective glance (van Manen, 1990). So, it is through conversational remembering, readings of others, and art, that phenomenological researchers capture the essence of the phenomenon of

lived times. The pre-reflective restructuring of the essence in this understanding, is not an act of reduction describing the parts of an event, but rather an act of opening, revealing the living moment in time, our Being in time.

Step by step we follow the clues on the map. Seeking the buried and the hidden, the invisible and unseen, we plunge deeper and deeper into the jungles of our lives. Each point on the map is dug up and unearthed, exposing insightful clues that bring us a little closer to the treasure. Each clue reveals a level of meaning that entices us to go further and further into the jungle and deeper and deeper into the earth.

Map Readers

In order to understand the clues on the map, we need help from interpreters. Those who have gone before us provide insights to what the clues reveal. Heidegger (1953/1996) suggests that phenomenology allows meaning to open wide, “to show itself...manifest...bring to day light...provide a middle voice...or place in brightness” (p. 25). “The ‘phenomena’ are, thus, the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to light. Beings show themselves from themselves in various lived ways depending on the mode of access to them” (p. 25). Couched in the world of my phenomenon, mid-life women show themselves from themselves through their revealings about living on a sailboat at the midpoint of their lives. Conversations with sailing women are used to uncover their pre-reflective lived moments and, like clues to a treasure, will assist in understanding their, and ultimately our, Being in the world.

Rogers (1970) speaks about the phenomenon of the lived in another way. “Man’s [sic] capacity for experiencing himself and his world identifies his humanness. Abstract (pre-reflective) thought couched in language enables him to grope toward cosmic understanding” (p. 72). She gives another clue when she suggests that art, philosophy, religion and music are testimonies to a person’s potential to transcend one’s present self to another level of knowing. “Man [sic] is characterized by the capacity for abstraction, imagery, language, thought, sensation and emotion” (p. 73). Couched in terms of my research question, women at mid-life are characterized by the capacity to think abstractly and to recall pre-reflective moments. Sailing will serve as my imagining platform for exploring these thoughts, sensations and emotions. Phenomenology is the research methodology most suited to open up abstract, imagined, languaged, and thought through sensorially lived ways.

Carpeneto (1996) shows the value of phenomenological research brought to the consideration of women in mid-life, explained by her as a “coming to embody a spiritual or transpersonal aspect of self” (p. 101). Her clue to us is to use phenomenological research to help mid-life women connect with their inner selves struggling to come forth. Carpeneto asks, “What is the nature of this lived experience, and how can I bring this experience out of hiding and make it intelligible to others?” (p. 105). This is the question that reveals what it means to be a living being at the chronological mid-point in one’s life. The question, alone, illuminates. The question does not require an answer, but with gentle coaxing, it can encourage a rendering that will leave us speechless and in awe of our inspired everydayness.

Tools for Unearthing Meaning

To unearth meaning we consider the tools available to us. Without tools we are unable to dig and dig deeper for meaning. Our tools are questions formed, human science applied, tensions exploited, visible and invisible ways understood, and others embraced. These tools are not technical constructs; they are ways of being present to lived experience in order to bring it out into the open.

Questions. “Thus, a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 370); and, so, the tireless stream of questions begins. First, a question is asked; then, a response is given, which leads to another question, which leads to another response and so on. We dig deeper with each inquiry until the text is saturated, until there is no more to add and no more to take away. Questions and questioning involve a personal process. We must own the content of the question for it to be meaningful. It is a question for us, as researchers, as well as for those being asked. Repeating the words of another’s question is lifeless and dead. We form a personal question and understand the depths from which it springs. As emphatic answers to questions of being are unobtainable, we know the continual quest for answers is the purpose. Meaning making through questioning keeps us awake to the journey. “To understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 375).

In “phenomenological research the question to be formulated is about the meaning of being” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 4) and, in order for me to formulate the

question, the meaning of being must be available to me. In my knowing, I search for meaning. “Every question is a seeking...Questions are a knowing search for beings in their thatness and whatness” (Heidegger, p. 3). Questioning is the art of digging deeper to mine meaning. Overtime, the questions the researcher asks become deeper and more penetrating until the questions, not the answers, become her signature (Metzger, 1992). Meaning is laid open by the questions asked and the direction to which they point. Like a road sign pointing to the horizon, meaning unfolds as the journey progresses and as long as the questions do not stop.

“Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 363). To break “the thing” (p. 363) open is to “bring into the open” (Gadamer, p. 363) its essence. To open is to “not close down” or to “raise up” (Barnhart, 1995 p. 503). Thus, in our effort to reveal, we strive to “not close down” with others but to “raise up” with them and render meaning through the questions. For a question to have significance, it must reveal...“the questionability of what is questioned” (Gadamer, p. 363) that is, it is the indeterminable state of the question that makes it open, and “Every true question requires this openness” (p. 363). In its indeterminable state, the question is not limited and is without boundaries. When spoken, it breaks open to a vastness as immense as the sea itself. As we look into the abyss, perhaps, we see the glimmer of the treasure.

Gadamer (1960/1989) cautions that the openness is limited by the horizon, the range of vision at the present moment. Yet, he offers the possibility of expanding the horizon, “Questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid” (p. 367) and in

this fluid state, the horizon can expand to further openings, allowing a vision that surpasses all we have known.

The word *question* or *questioning* had its beginning in the 1200's and referred only to the queries formulated around philosophical or theological problems (Barnhart, 1995). The root word for question is a "query which means to search, seek, gain, or ask" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 627). Questions, then, were originally a means to search through philosophical unearthing; thus, their use to mine meaning through the philosophical musing of phenomenology is a natural fit.

Human science. Van Manen (1990) defines human science in terms of phenomenology where the purpose is to study meaning by gaining knowledge of "patterning, structures and levels of experience" (p. 181) found in daily lives. Through hermeneutics, "the theory and practice of interpretation" (p. 179), phenomenological research unearths meaning from the lived experiences of people and attempts to capture and interpret it with language. The patterns, structures and experiences revealed through human science research are expressed from the observed and said moments of life. Human science considers the perceived visible and invisible elements of the lived experience that come to light by our merely being with others. Thus, human science is a way to consider and articulate through language our being with others in the world.

Tension. The capacity to tolerate and revel in tension presents opportunity for discovery. Tension or anxiety that is not mulled over in an obsessive manner, will lead beings to freedom (Kierkegaard, 1980). From an existential point of view, life

means nothing without tension and anxiety, and if we remove them from our lives, we die. We have no other way to our core, to our reason for being, other than through tension. Tension lives between the quiet and the roar. When we widen the gap and expose the tensions of the lived, a hole that tunnels to the light appears, and *Dasein* is within grasp of our understanding. Courage to experience tension and anxiety will unearth Being.

Being is disclosed through the tensions of anxiety, dread, and angst (Heidegger, 1953/1996). “The fundamental attunement of angst is an eminent disclosedness of *Dasein*” (Heidegger, p. 172). That is, our submission to the world to encounter it fully, to allow the anxiety to be experienced fully is an important opportunity for meaning to present itself. That from which we want to flee, is rich with meaning. Heidegger wants us to consider turning toward the anxiety in a way that allows phenomenological interpretation. We are encouraged to open up to the dread and allow it in, feel its tension. Anxiety and tension do not oppress, but, rather, they reveal opportunity. Anxiety is part of being in the world.

“Angst...fetches *Dasein* back out of its entangled absorption in the ‘world’ and everyday familiarity collapses” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 176). If we allow fear and tension to take over our state of angst, we lose our enlightening opportunity. “Fear is angst which has fallen prey to the ‘world’. It is inauthentic and concealed from itself as such” (Heidegger, p. 177). Fear is anxiety that is no longer illuminating but destructive. Angst is the edge, verge, tip of the moment we seek when the sail has begun and we race toward the horizon. It lies timelessly in the present moment of the

inhalation of livedness. Here is meaning most profound. Here lies the moment we seek. Seek the angst and you will find meaning. So, mid-life women sailors seek the unusual life of the sea way, for therein lays angst. Tensions live here, and we embrace them for they are tools that illuminate and show us the way to life's buried treasure, the meaning of this seaway experience.

Living within tension and using it to illuminate our way, is exemplified in the sea way of a boat in a storm. Tensions are high as the crew creatively secures the boat for a building gale. They shorten sail, change direction, and secure the fuel cans on deck. The tension and anxiety the storm creates among the crew are like lightening bolts that strike the soul. Opening themselves up to the possibilities of the moment, their hearts pound and breathing becomes faster. They are on the edge of fear, but do not succumb. They stop and feel the rush; the adrenalin rush can be eye opening. If they let fear penetrate, the soul closes down to an inwardly way of being. No longer in the world, they rush and hide within. The fear blinds them and they become lost. The boat flounders and becomes "entangled" (Heidegger, 1953/1996) in the nets of day to day. They lose their window to be with themselves. They merely exist in the wet, wild world of the sea. They merely exist in an "inauthentic" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 40) place.

Tension means a "stretched condition, a stretching" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 802). To stretch means to reach for something beyond one's immediate grasp and to grow beyond the present. The root word of tension is "tense, as in stretched tight, a state of nervous tension or to make or become nervous" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 802). Tension is

an opportunity for growth, the beyond. Tension and anxiety result from a mid life choice to live on a sailboat and turn away from the land life. Tension experienced compels a seeking of relief. So, when we experience tension, we run to the invisible to find the freedom to just be. We run to our “disappearing” places, hideouts, secret spots, and safe havens to catch our breath. It is here that infinite and unquestionable love and acceptance are found. The place of self-repose becomes a place of reflection, a place of me discovered following anxious times.

If permitted, tensions give birth to authentic experience, and the pre-reflected moments of experience give birth to meaning. Because our pre-reflective experiences of tension are exclusive unto each, meaning is person specific. Though individual meaning may be unique to each person, themes call out and express commonality with others. Tensions, thus, become a means to unearth the shared treasure of common meaning.

Visible and invisible. The place between the visible and the invisible is an in-between place. It is the ocean between lands, leading to the unseen shore of the invisible self. The visible land is held away as our ship floats away from it toward the invisible place of horizon. Our horizon is the range of vision from our particular vantage point. Conversations and questions help us know this horizon. Our horizon is ever forming and changing. We blend past horizons with present horizons to gain an understanding of ourselves and others. It is the tension between the past and present that reveals and opens up the horizon to its vastness. The hermeneutic task consists of bringing this tension out and using it to reveal meaning (Gadamer, 1960/1989).

The pregnant pause, a term of the feminine, is found in this in-between place. It is the moment in time when voices stop. Suspended in the last breath taken, our spirits emerge for a peek at the visible. We float above our bodies and grin at the possible. We take a look below, from above, and get the “big picture” view. To experience the invisible in a non-temporal space, and to find language to capture the panorama, is impossible. There are no words for *Dasein*; there are only impressions. So, instead, I will tell a story and reveal my impressions of invisible ways.

I am sailing my boat; the wind lifts the vessel, just so, and I skim the surface of the invisible. It rocks me. The motion hypnotizes. I view my wet world as an in-between place where the visible pulls away and more invisible lies over the horizon. I race to it, and in my journey, I feel pink soft shapes and the warmth of my being. An over-whelming sense of all rightness, emancipation and freedom ensues. For a moment, I live in the moment; and then it is over, and I am on land again.

Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) calls the in-between place a chiasm or intertwining of the visible and the tangible. The *chiasm* is the cleavage, invisible, betweenness that is like a dream (1964/1968). A chiasm comes from the word *chiasma* which is an anatomical intersection or “genetic crossing-over” (Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary, 1992, p. 229). The visible is what we see with our eyes. The tangible is what we touch; it is the invisible perception gained by the act of touching (Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary, 1992) that reveals the meaning. Thus, through Merleau-Ponty’s (1964/1968) eyes, we can appreciate the invisible as

...an abyss that separates the In Itself from the For Itself...our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees

them and touches them; we say... that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the 'object and to the 'subject' reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders. It can not be by incomprehensible accident that the body has a double reference; it teaches us that each calls for the other. (p. 137)

The visible calls for the invisible perceived, and the perceived calls for the visible.

This in-between place between visible and invisible is a wonderland--a blending place where I stop in space, you start in space, we overlap in space and all become one in place. "Like the natural man, we situate ourselves in ourselves and in the things, in ourselves and in the other at the point where, by a sort of chiasm, we become the other and become the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 160).

The physical body is "a hollow from whence a vision will come" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 147). Our vision is created through our memory of past events, pre-reflective moments of remembered sensations collected and stored in our minds, housed in our flesh. "What we are calling flesh, this interiorly worked-over mass, has no name in any philosophy. As the formative medium for the object and the subject, it is not the atom of being..." (p. 147). Merleau-Ponty's focus is on the importance of the physical body in the world as an entity of perception for conveying what it means to be in the world. The body is the link to our understanding of being in the world. "The body contributes more than it receives, adding to the world that I see the treasure necessary for what the other body sees" (p. 144). The tools of the invisible open up for us the treasures found within the other.

Others. It is the relationship to the other that is the key to understanding being. Without having proximal relations or intimate relations with the other, it is not

possible to grasp what it means to be in the world (Heidegger, 1953/1996). “The relation of being to others then becomes a projection of one’s own being toward oneself ‘into another’. The Other is a double of the self” (Heidegger, p. 117). Mid-life is a time of “opening up to others” (Rountree, 1993, p. 4) as women realize they are not in this lived way alone. So, we sailors often choose to float in being with another life. On a ship at sea, we float in our world and hold onto the other to give our journey meaning and purpose. We know a boat does not float aimlessly. The work of the others aboard steer it purposely to destinations. We “clasp another body and with hands the clasping gives everything it receives” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p.144). A give and take of physical strength and knowledge describes the team work of a crew. Truly at sea we realize that our movement, touch, and vision applied to the other begins the paradox of human expression--being together--discovering meaning.

Only through revisiting our relations with others can we understand *Dasein*.

What it means to be in the world is experienced through our placement and our intimacy with others.

For the first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying itself to it carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with its hands the strange stature which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goals, fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, of making itself the outside of its inside and inside of its outside. Henceforth, movement, touch, and vision applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 144)

Mid-life is a time to open up. It is a time when we seek the tensions of being with others. The exchange between bodies is like an energy flow. A high-tension wire

is a metaphorical description of the moment. We envision two together with energized exchanges. Without exchange, we wither and die. Isolated in our own aloneness, *Dasein* stagnates. We know when it is time to interact and exchange energy with others. Our sense of the “right time” is like an alarm.

Our temporality is circadian in that our body’s rhythms tell us what and when things are needed. We know when to eat in that we hunger. We know when to sleep because we nod. We know when we need tension, because we seek others. We know when we need the presence of others to provide answers without words and to allow the flow of energy between. We know when to seek others for it is the Other that answers all questions of Being (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968).

Emmanuel Levinas, a phenomenologist who lived from 1906-1995, contributed unique insights to our understanding of the Other. He stated that the Other is not another me, nor is it something defined as it relates to me. The Other is something completely unique and separate from me, present in either my past or present (Levinas, 1961/1969).

In Levinas’s way of seeing the world, the Other is the way to transcendence and infinity. Everything revolves around the Other including time, death and language. He concludes that time is a mode of opening up to the Other as time is not a solitary experience. Death is the final giving up of control over one’s life, and in order to accept what death means, and still achieve all possibilities in life, the Other is required. Language, too, requires the Other; it is being purposeful only in light of the Other. Language is the means of communicating with the Other and realizing that the

Other is not me, but rather one that transcends me. To Levinas, the Other is a spiritual announcement that allows human kind to flee their daily world ways (Levinas, 1961/1969).

As mid-life women, we take a circular journey. We venture within ourselves and come right back out, seeking the Other. Levinas (1961/1969) suggests that transcended ways and meaning making occurs by interacting with the Other. To listen to the voice of the Other, is to hear the muse that leads us to transcendence. Without the Other there are no ears to hear us; our mouths are empty voids from which soundless noise spews forth.

“Relationships with Others”

My field opens and I am exposed
pouring out as I pull in.
Getting stronger and warmer
filling to the hilt, transcending.

I pour out and in
I expand and fill, simultaneously.
An energy exchange, self-perpetuating.

Are relationships with others exchanges of energy?
Failure to open prevents the flow.
No flow--isolated
Isolated--no opening.

Mid-life is a time to open, to flow
a time to look back and forth
to speak with silence,
to move while still
to blow up into pieces without reducing
to laugh with no smile
to be with others without domination or competition.

Is mid-life
a being completely different time?

Or has the Other made it,
a Being completely different in time? (Schaefer, 2002)

So, it seems to be that meaning lies with the Other--our sounding board, reflector, responder, repeater, validator and confessor. The Other has ears that hear the invisible sonorous vibrations we utter from our inner self. Voices carry perceptions of the experienced, and the Other validates their existence with a nod, smile or frown. We need the Other to understand the wholeness of it all. The Other is of the flesh and beyond the flesh. The Other is the way to the unconscious. In our vertical way of viewing, the Other is our tool to gain access to the horizontal horizon.

Phenomenology is the search for the Other's buried ways using the tools of the unique. As I have described, these tools are not technical constructs, they are ways of being present to lived experience. Intentional acts allow our ways of being present to reveal meaning. Like sailing a boat, carefully thought out acts of the crew propel the vessel to a desired destination. What actions do the curious pursue as we sail to the buried treasure we call meaning? Tools in hand, we board our boats, and sail to where the treasure lies. When we arrive at the designated place, we use the phenomenological guidelines as outlined by van Manen (1990) to reveal the sought after bounty.

Sailing to Meaning with Phenomenological Methodology

No one action by a boat's crew makes a sailboat move through the water toward the next horizon. It takes a series of acts in no particular order to make a boat go. Each action in the methodology of sailing enables the vessel to go its chosen way. We face the wind, raise the main sail, raise the jib, tighten the "foot" of the sail, reef

the sail, ease the “foot,” ease the sheets, move the “traveler,” adjust the fairleads, or release the vang. The acts occur in no particular order; we act and reenact in response to a change in the wind or sea. We consider our situation each moment and we adjust the sails accordingly.

So, too, is our experience with phenomenological research as outlined by van Manen (1990). Through his eyes, we consider six activities that steer us through phenomenology’s meaning-making journey:

- turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

His words reveal a dynamic process or way to experience a meaning-making journey.

It is not a step by step method. It is a multi-tasking way, or back and forth way.

Bateson (1990) reminds us that this is what women do best; they are multi-tasking jugglers who look forward and back all at the same time. We pursue one activity, run to another, and return to the first. With each revisit we mine new meaning and discover new ways and strengths. We dig, rewrite, rename, reconsider, and reinvent. All the while, we converse, write, meet, greet, touch, and love. Then again, we return to our digging, mining, revisiting, rewriting, renaming, reconsidering, and reinventing. Van Manen’s named activities are actualized in the sailing adventures of mid-life women partaking in a journey to horizon.

This is the research methodology of phenomenology. It is a series of acts considered and used in no particular order that reveals meaning. Equipped with van Manen's ways to unearth meaning, I prepare to find and describe the "essences...and that which grounds the things of our experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 32).

Turning to a Phenomenon Which Commits Us to the World

A non-wavering commitment toward a single thought considered in a deep way is the practice of thoughtfulness. It is this focused thinking about our phenomenon that commits us to it, and, in turn, commits us to the world about which it reveals (van Manen, 1990). Capturing the meaning beyond descriptions, in wordless ways, and through formless rememberings of being in the world, is phenomenology's way. Through this methodology an attempt is made to give voice to the unspeakable, words to wordless, and form to the amorphous lived life Heidegger (1953/1996) calls Being.

As described in Chapter One, I am a sailor committed to the "sea way," a life of sailing and living aboard a boat. This life, considered by me for over 14 years, is my anticipated way of living in the world. Chapter One reveals my turning to the phenomenon as I ask the question, "What is the lived experience of mid-life women who have chosen the sea way as sailor"? The answer is unique to me, yet, common to many. The meaning found through my inquiry will reveal meaning worth sharing. The sea way of living on a boat and sailing it to destinations are lived ways from which a special world view can be expressed. I turn to phenomenological methodology to reveal the essence of this lived way. As Heidegger says, we will "let

that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 58).

Investigating Experience as Lived Rather than Conceptualized

“Phenomenological research aims at establishing a renewed contact with original experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 31). It has to do with living life deeply in such a way as to seek wisdom in the everyday. It means we fully participate in the experience through our living “relations and shared situations” (van Manen, p. 32). It requires our participation. As phenomenological researchers, it is desirable that we have lived the phenomenon and share a participation in a lived way known to our research participants. In addition, we actively explore and seek out the “category of lived experience in all its modalities and aspects” (van Manen, p. 32). We seek other writings, images, or expressions of our lived phenomenon. Any expression of the lived way of the experience that can be formulated for common understanding has potential for meaning making.

Conceptualization and abstract over-intellectualization will not do. Conceptual thought that reduces experiences is a barrier to what we seek to open up. The methodology we practice is an opening up way that unearths and peels back the hidden. It is a revealing experience that expresses ways of being in the world with the phenomenon. Chapter Two reveals this initial exploration that continued as I engaged in the study.

Conversations and questions reveal the lived. Conversations with mid-life sailing women gave me access to the phenomenon. It is through conversations with

others about our phenomenon that we begin to expose the meaning of lived ways. The deeper we engage in conversation, the more is revealed. The more we learn and the deeper the human interest, the more the questions arise. Without conversational questions, the unknown remains and we remain wondering. Thus, we hope the conversation compels a question or leads the participants down a path that deepens our understanding of the human mystery (Metzger, 1992). Questions arise until the subject is saturated--full up. Then silence takes over; silence means something has been fulfilled and we can stop the questioning for the moment (van Manen, 1990).

I am not afraid of what might be said or asked during conversation. It is what is not said that provokes the phenomenological wondering--the silent invisible. Conversations reveal the hidden. Stories of women at mid-life reveal patterns of thought and lived moments. We start our conversational wanderings picking up these patterned threads; along the way, we consult wizards, gods, and sages to assist in the unearthing. Perhaps a poem will form to clarify our impressions, or a metaphor will appear to paint another view of the meaning.

“Conversations”

I have cried alone--but no more.
 I face my anger with you.
 The pains so long within me, a scar.
 Alone, I can only rub it, I can not testify to it without your ears.
 The barrier of silence is overcome with shared memory.
 I salvage myself and go forth smiling.
 To share in conversation unveils the lived.
 The meaning of the lived heals the hurt. (Schaefer, 2002)

The conversations used in this research do not uncover reality for just one, but multiple realities for many. They are an attempt to get to the hidden meaning of a

community that has shared in a phenomenon. Conversations bond conversants. “Both come under the influence of truth of the object and are bound to one another in community” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 379). So, the conversation of a phenomenological undertaking has a couple of benefits: revealing and bonding. The bonding is built on mutual understanding from dialogue. It is not an exercise in “one-upmanship” and “asserting one’s view,” but it is about “being transformed onto a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (Gadamer, p. 379). Insightful conversation reveals new meaning and we are never the same after experiencing it. Preliminary conversations with women sailors to open my phenomenon are shared in Chapter Two. Continuing conversations with the women of my study provide new insights about what this bonded community can provide.

Gadamer (1960/1989) suggests that conversations take on their own life. Genuine conversation is not willed or persuaded by either participant; we fall into it. It is a sonorous wandering journey that opens us up. When the wandering stops, conversation should stop of its own accord, for to interrupt it would be a contradiction. To talk about one’s self and to tell one’s story is part of living a life. To interrupt or stop the story is to shut off the life flow (Neuman & Peterson, 1997). No preconceived ideas enter the process, for that would be a telling. The thoughts revealed are surprises, gifts. The conversation has spirit, and it lives life breathed into it from willing participants. Its own truth revealed, the conversation is not judged or awarded--it is.

“If we can overcome the inherent limitations of our senses, using our eyes to hear, and our ears to see, suddenly, everything will become clear” (Scherer, 2000. p. 95). To go the phenomenological way is to go beyond our senses to follow the force of our inherent ways of bodily knowing. Our memory, perceptions, choice of place and manner of behavior, both physical and social, formulate our way of being in the world. I mine the meaning of these ways to gain insight into the ontological quest to answer the question, “What does it mean to be?” Phenomenological research is an attempt to formulate an answer, within the inherent limits of language.

Silent communication. Meaning making interactions occur in other ways through touch, sight and smell. Our silent senses, unencumbered by the baggage of words, are receptacles for the truth. “Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement takes place between two people” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 385) but, so, too, can misunderstanding occur.

Silent communication tells a story as clear as any voice. Silence is the space between the words, the stops between the speakers in conversation. To understand the unsaid, requires a special approach. Neglecting the quiet is to miss a part of the story altogether. The silence screams at us with questions. What have I done to silence the speaker? Is it an act or word I or another has said that quiets someone? Systematic silencing of minority groups, such as women, occurs in our social context. How does this fact have relevance to my work with this chosen group?

Stories remain silent and untold for good reasons. The potential harm they could cause by being told can not be ignored. Painful memories or hidden acts may

need to be unsaid to protect the integrity of the sayer. We must respect the silence and move on. Realizing that the unsaid words are part of the lived experience reminds us of the depth to which our conversations might go. Respect for the untold is required, and we need to think through what it means to relate to others who use silence to stop the flow (Neuman & Peterson, 1997). Let the silence hang in the air like a bubble. Watch it float away to the horizon for revealing on another day.

Silence is the way of the “taken for granted” (van Manen, 1990, p. 112), realized by thoughts too mundane to talk about. It is also the way of intimacy where words are not needed. Silence can reflect the unspeakable, that which leaves us speechless. It is in the tension of this moment of unspeakableness that true creativity can emerge. Mid-life is filled with unspeakable moments and, thus, can be the most creative time of our life (Rountree, 1993). “This is when our freedom to be who we truly are emerges” (p. 5). The tension of unspeakable moments gives way to reflection which causes a bursting forth of voice. Unable to be contained, we surprise ourselves and the world with the depth and power of our once silent voice.

Has everything that needs to be said been said? Is it time for silence now? The voice escapes the crack between our lips and shouts to us in silence. It is quiet time. We always return to silence (van Manen, 1990) for that is the moment of reflection, insight and meaning making. Silence shapes meaning and enables the response to our question to come forth. Silence melts the horizon and expands it. Silence engulfs me and in its quietness, I grope for the hand of the Other. Silence does not mean being

alone for it resides in the same place where the Other lives. Silence resides in the place where truth is spoken without the encumbrance of words like an untold story.

Unconventional tellings. “An untold story, or one told unconventionally, without words, relates the teller’s continuing struggle to live” (Neuman & Peterson, 1997, p. 108). Unconventional tellings--what are they? To cry, to run away, to stare, to smile, to climb a mountain or to sail a boat are action statements. Such statements are tellings made in nonverbal or unconventional ways. Actions, though silent, hold rich stories that resist vocal saying. They tell the teller’s tale through motions that are stated through lived choices. Choices of expression, movement, clothing, environment, objects and others are part of the tellers’ lives and speak volumes about their being. The act of living on a boat and sailing across oceans comprises a series of non-voiced choices, expressing uniqueness as sure as any language that attempts to capture lived phenomena.

I walk the docks of Annapolis and I look at inhabited sailboats. Some are at anchor or tethered to buoys--tied to the invisible earth below --and some are at wharfs --tied to the visual land. The collection of objects seen on the decks of sailboats and their state of repair tell the lived experience of the inhabitants within. Choice of dingy, sail cover, radar reflector, navigational instruments, color of hull, number of masts, construction of rigging, number and type of anchors, tidy decks or messy decks, bikes tied on board or not, cooking grills in use or covered, dodger and bimini shapes all reflect individual ways. One can tell about the sailor’s way by the choices made. The experience of a recent ocean passage can be gleaned by just looking at the

condition of the vessel when it pulls into port. Disheveled decks, torn or unkempt sails, lines and ropes loose and uncoiled, poles and other deck accoutrements strewn about tell the story of the journey. To the trained eye of a sailor, the language of the unsaid speaks volumes about the recent experience of the lives on board. The unconventional tellings are important elements in my exchanges with women who live on boats.

Conversation unspoken is akin to seeing the invisible; we seek the unspoken and unseeing places of being. It is here the message is clearer, authentic, heartfelt and soulful. What does it mean to consider conversation between invisible souls? Gadamer (1960/1989) cautions us that to translate from one language to another, in an attempt to facilitate, can distort conversation. So, to translate the nonverbal and the unseen into spoken language has the potential to limit and distort meaning unless the translator participates in the invisible exchange. Thus, the importance of researchers becoming active participants in the phenomenological inquiry becomes apparent: “Only if he [sic] participates in the subject of discussion can he make mutual understanding possible” (Gadamer, p. 388).

Invisible ways with They and Other reveal the lived. How do we breathe music, feel art, appreciate the livedness of another’s experience? What tells me that my words represent the essence of another’s meaning? The missed, overlooked, and lost in the everyday are the invisible ways we seek to know. Understanding the invisible is the purpose.

Heidegger (1953/1996) suggests we must avoid “idle talk” in our search for meaning for it is a mode of “groundless floating” (p. 163). It suppresses being in the world with its uprootedness everywhere and nowhere. Idle talk is directed at the They and not the Other (1953/1996). Heidegger is concerned that we will lose ourselves in the They. “*Dasein* presents itself with the possibility, in idle talk,...of losing itself in the ‘they,’ of falling prey to groundlessness that means that *Dasein* prepares itself for...the constant temptation of falling prey” (p. 165). Falling prey to the ever present They masks meaning. We need to appreciate the Other. The Other is “Those from whom one mostly does not distinguish oneself. Those among whom one is, too” (Heidegger, p. 111). Others share a sameness of being with us which makes the They seem irrelevant and false. The They is “being of the other” (p. 119), not of yourself. Other is “being with one another” (p. 119) in shared community. Heidegger calls the They a dictatorship. In our inauthentic ways of being in the world, “We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way ‘they’ enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way ‘they’ see and judge...Every priority is noiselessly squashed” (p. 119). When we relate to the They, all of our priorities for living authentic lives, as embodied in our relating to the Other, are squashed by the dictator, They.

So, let us replace the They with the Other. The Other is not the They. The Other is the one that shares the invisible with us. For the invisible to be understood between us, a naming takes place through the language of conversation. It is the purpose of language to articulate the invisible and formulate meaning. “The words of

others make me think and speak because they create within me an other than myself, a divergence...the other's words form a grillwork through which I see my thought" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 224). We think the words of others in order to speak. Our thoughts are made up of both horizontal and vertical being and together at the chiasm, they make up "coinage of this total being--delimitations--within" (p. 224). Our invisible thoughts make us one with the Other.

Reflecting on Themes which Characterize the Phenomenon

Themes are essential clues in the phenomenological search for meaning-full treasure. When we hear a similar melody echoing from the mouths of more than one participant, perhaps we are onto something meaning-full. When a theme presents itself, it is considered in all its depth. "In other words, phenomenological research consists of reflectively bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life" (van Manen, 1990, p. 32). My reflective question asks, "**What is the lived experience of mid-life women who have chosen the sea way as sailor**"? The commonality of responses bring to voice obscured meaning that evades our every day intelligence.

Themes began to present themselves in preliminary conversations shared with Niki and Mary. Their descriptions of the lived sea way are described briefly in Chapter Two. They share with us thoughts that center around relationships, place perceptions and mid-life temporality. These themes were echoed in the journals of other sailors, in texts and novels written by and about women who have sailed, and in historical texts about sailing women in the early part of the 19th Century.

Themes abound and I share my consideration of them in Chapter Four.

Themes were construed following hours of conversation with nine participants. Our mutual reflection, writing, consideration and experiences brought us into nearness in the identification of essential themes that helped to reveal the treasured meaning of our lived ways.

We desire to make sense of it all by articulating themes and then coaxing meaning from them. A theme named comes as a result of a process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure (van Manen, 1990). A theme is a bridge to a notion. It is sharpened insight into something, and, like art, it can give expression to what appears as a formless notion.

The themes identified through phenomenological methodology speak to me both as an observer and participant. They are my themes, and they open and reveal my lived ways, too. Van Manen (1990) raises a question in my mind for me to consider, “Does not the final analysis to make sense of life’s phenomena reside in the fundamental views realized by the researcher?” Yes, I conclude that my lived way and life orientation affect the naming of essential themes influencing the sense-making of the research. Therefore, theme naming should not be done alone; the Other must be part of this work.

“Themes are the stars that make up the universe of meaning we live through” (van Manen, 1990, p. 90). By the light of these stars, we sailors navigate the oceans in search of the next port. The stars are the themes that lead us to the “yet found.” They lead us to new places where we consider and ponder the day to day. When we leave

the port and return to sea, we reflect, consider, and give voice to the experience. Then, we gaze above and seek the next star. Themes give us a direction on our voyage to meaning making.

Describing the Phenomenon Through Writing and Rewriting

“Hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity” (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). Writing cultivates the being of the writer; her interpretations of the themes transpire, forming a voice needing to say something important (van Manen, 1990).

“To write is to construct a self...to know oneself deeply and in relation to the world” (Metzger, 1992, p. 8). In our search for self, writing allows for place identification in the world. It puts forth the language of the senses, describing the in-between place of *Dasein* where we meet ourselves, perhaps for the first time.

Phenomenology does not aim to explain in a technical way the “meaning of a culture, social group, historical period, or individual personal history. Rather, it explains meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, and meaning has roots in past life worlds” (van Manen, 1990, p. 11). Exposing ourselves to the writings of others, and writing and rewriting our own thoughts reveals past life worlds that articulate the being we hope to express. Accounts of this type are the background needed to identify the lived. Conversations also reveal past life worlds. They capture the lived through descriptions of daily experience. The images create pictures in our minds that put us on firmer ground to consider what is next.

Hearing stories about the everyday ways of living aboard a sailboat and putting them into writing is like creating a mental 3-D movie. We wander within and throughout the experience with the tellers; then, we leave the experience with a clearer picture of their lives. We feel we have been made part of their lives, and that serves as our stepping-off place to explore the Being of mid-life women. The methodology of phenomenological writing includes the use of etymology, metaphor and poetry. These are creative writing ways to dig and dig deeper for the buried treasure we seek, the meaning of the sailing way at mid-life.

Etymology's descriptive way. "Origins of words put us in touch with the original form of life where the terms still had living ties to the lived experience from which they originally came" (van Manen, 1990, p. 59). Etymological understanding is found throughout my phenomenological research and it brings deeper understanding of mid-life and the sailing experience. "When researching the lived, ordinary language provides a vast reservoir to understand the human experience" (van Manen, p. 61). Etymology takes the understanding even deeper as we delve into the vastness of the intended meaning of language. Is doing etymology a reduction? Do we dissect and pull apart to understand meaning? No, like phenomenology itself, etymology is an opening up of an intended original thought. It is going back to the original memory, the pre-reflective and intended meaning of words. When conducting phenomenological research, the use of etymology gives authenticity to my voice, as well as that of the participants.

Metaphor's revealing way. "The full realization of conversations comes when something is expressed that is not only mine or the person who speaks, but what is held in common through language" (Hultgren, 1991, p. 45). Metaphors are a part of a common language. They are used to organize our world (Hultgren). They bond us on common ground and serve as a connecting field for conversations about the human experience. Sailing a boat on the ocean is both a metaphor and lived way. It is a text filled with beautiful possibilities for the expression of meaning. Metaphorical descriptions of place, environment, purpose or activities are revealing for the mid-life woman who is living in the tension of mid-life issues.

Each of us is a storehouse for memories. How can we tap into our memories and use them to articulate what it means to be in the world? Often trapped in our minds after years of forgetting, left behind as insignificant, we tease out archived thoughts for our mutual consideration. We value the remembered pre-reflective memories, and use them to talk about women's mid-life events. Metaphor helps us remember by running a "parallel program" through which we can recall the forgotten.

We, as women, are called together by shared metaphors. Mid-life is a temporal force that calls all women to the table for a cup of tea. It is temporal in a phenomenological way of thinking as it is not only about chronological time, but, rather about moving to becoming that is not time related (Heidegger, 1953/1996). As we sip the tea, discussion ensues naturally around subjects of lived mid-life moments. Metaphorical reality brings common understanding to a common group and serves as a platform for self-exploration. Boat life, a microcosm of lived life, is also a metaphor

that distills the environment into a manageable context where exploration of Being can occur. The placid image of a boat on the water inspires participants to “sail away,” relax and reveal. Metaphor gives us conceptual hangers upon which we place each of our unique rememberings.

Poetry’s expressive way. Can the poetic voice demand responses in a way that “circumvents the habitual, destructive ways in which we now converse” (Ayers & Miller, 1998, p. 67)? Poetry is an illuminating way, an art form, giving expression without excess baggage. It cuts to the core and grates on the soul demanding to be heard. It whittles away the unnecessary, inauthentic words in the pursuit of deeper meaning. The art of carving away the unnecessary and capturing the essence is a search for soulful ways. I borrow and compose poetry to get to the heart of the matter, to cut away and expose a soft spot so my message can penetrate. Poetry involves the voice in an original singing of the world. When we engage language in the primal way of poetry, we return to authentic meaning. We discover what lies at the core of our being. “So that in the words, or perhaps better, in spite of the words, we find memories that paradoxically we never thought or felt before” (van Manen, 1996, p. 13).

When using poetry in our research, care must be taken to prevent ourselves from being accused of navel gazing. That is, poetry is implicit and particular in memory to the considerations of its authors and readers; this makes it more difficult to create explicit universal meaning. So when writing or incorporating the poetic way into our text, it is necessary to appreciate possible meanings it may portray. Though

we must respect it, we must also appreciate its author may have shunned its application to universal lessons. Its value, however, can not be overlooked in that poetry gives expression to aspects of the human experience that communicates vivid truths (van Manen, 1996).

Poetry is a structure for the artist's conception. It is a performance medium used to communicate a view. It is a magical transformation of pure thought into the limited expression of language. Poetry calls to be recited and said aloud for others to hear. It is a public voice of feelings that requires an audience, and, in turn, demands a response. If that response it said aloud and meaning making evoked, so much the better.

“The Secret”

Two girls discover
the secret of life
in a sudden line of
poetry.

I who don't know the
secret wrote in
the line. They told me

(through a third person)
they had found it
but not what it was,
not even

what line it was. No doubt
by now, more than a week
later, they have forgotten
the secret,

the line, the name of
the poem. I love them

for finding what
I can't find.

and for loving me
for the line I wrote:
and for forgetting it
so that

a thousand times, till death
finds them, they may
discover it again, in other
lines,

in other
happenings. And for
wanting to know it,
for

assuming there is
such a secret, yes,
for that
most of all. (Levertov, 1991, p. 296)

Levertov discovers the secret of life in a forgotten line of poetry. The author loves the girls who read her poem and then forgot the line. She loves them all the more for their forgetting. She knows the lived way of forgetting, and secrets continually will bring the girls and her self closer as they try to remember the forgotten. This message resonates with the horizontal view of past remembering and present experiencing. The poem captures a way of existing in the world where we look backward and forward with the Other. It expresses the way of meaning making from the everyday.

Heidegger suggests to us that the communication about disclosing existence can become the true aim of poetry. *Dasein* has a wealth of interpretations at its disposal. Poetry “pursues in its own way the extent, behavior, faculties, powers, possibilities and destinies of *Dasein*” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 14).

Poetry is a way to harvest thoughts for meaning making. “The poetic statement is speculative in that it does not reflect an existent reality... but represents the new appearance of a new world in the imaginary medium of poetic invention” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 470). Mid-life women seek a new appearance of a new world. It is a transcended place where we experience another way of Being.

Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Pedagogical Relation to the Phenomenon

“To be oriented to an object means that we are animated by the object in a full and human sense. To be strong in our orientation, means that we will not settle for superficialities and falsities” (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). Thus, the phenomenon owns us as we own it. It gives us life and we give life to it. To misrepresent it or speak about it in a false or careless way is not even considered in the phenomenological mind because to do so would be disrespectful to ourselves and our way in the world.

Having a pedagogical relation to our phenomenon means we can see the application of its meaning to the education of others in relation to the insights revealed. In my case, my application is to the education of adult women at mid-life. “Every situation in which I must act educationally ...requires that I must continuously and reflectively be sensitive to what authorized me as ...teacher” (van Manen, 1990, p. 149). The approach we seek to develop through research speaks to how the educator stands in life and how she relates to students. It tells her how she is “oriented.” To be oriented as researchers means that we do not separate theory from life or the public from the private. We are not simply teachers and researchers; we are researchers oriented to the world in a teaching way (van Manen, 1990). The final

chapter addresses the way in which my research can contribute to the on-going development of women at mid-life. Meaning revealed from the lived ways of sailing women during mid-life, informs those of us who live in that place. We gain a deeper understanding of our orientation to the world. Meaning expands knowledge about our stance in life for consideration by those who share this common human space.

Balancing the Research Context by Considering Parts and Whole

Every now and then as we go the phenomenological way, we need to stop, step back, and look at the big picture. As researchers, there needs to be a “constant measuring of the overall design of the study/text against the significance that the parts play in the total textual structure” (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). So, as not to get lost in our meanderings, an occasional overall looking is needed. It is easy to become lost in the writing and rewriting so that we no longer know what to do next. Consideration of whether our study and efforts are “grounded in a laying open of the question” (p. 34) is part of the overall questioning of our work.

To get to the end, we start at the beginning. To appreciate meaning learned from the lived ways of the whole, we must start by appreciating the unique ways of the one. The unique way described in the moment to moment, day to day, and routine ways of the present, remembered, and envisioned is the grounding of our journey. We walk into this world by invitation to gather the thoughts of others. Come along with me and other mid-life sailing women and hear of our journey to and through the sea way.

The Women on My Journey and My Process for Interaction

“Because women have appeared so seldom in literature as characters drawn by other women, there are entire dimensions of women’s experience that have remained secret--even common place” (van Manen, 1990, p. 37). I am a woman seeking other women to reveal the meaning of mid-life through our appreciation of a common experience of living on board and sailing a boat. The women I sought out to help reveal the meaning of this way were, at the time of our conversations, in their mid-life years and living on board a cruising sailboat.

For the purposes of my research, mid-life is defined in chronological time when a woman is 40-60 years old. Grambs (1989) reminds us that a woman also runs on a biological clock. Her body tells her time of life. She says, that at the point a woman can no longer bear children, menopause, life takes a serious turn (1989). Mid-life becomes a time of “serious turning,” tensions and reflection. As one woman put it, “I am on the edge of looking for something and afraid I won’t find it” (Rountree, 1993, p. 3).

A cruising sailboat is a type of sailboat that periodically leaves dockage to embark on a sea passage that covers significant distances. The boat can come in a variety of sizes and shapes, but for our purposes, it is enough that it can sustain life on board. That means that it is equipped with a galley, a head, and a sleeping berth. In addition, the boat must be capable of sailing from the land and has, in fact, been used to take the participant across a body of water within the last year.

Living on board, means that the participants consider the vessel their place of residence. Each participant in my study had lived on board the boat for at least six months at the time of our first conversation. The sea life of “live aboards” is a unique way of being. My mother, a weekend sailor, made the decision not to live on her boat, but rather to use it for only weekend sailing. She periodically reminds me that, “The live aboard life is not for everyone.” If this is true, and this life is not for everyone, then, I ask, “Who is it for?”

Who are these Sailors?

“If we ask the right questions, the answers can come” (Bolen, 1994, p. 15), and I have come to know answers are found in the voices of everyday people who populate our lives. In fact, for us to come to a knowing way through this work, it was not necessary for me to have had prior acquaintance with the women participants. It is enough that they shared my way of being in the sea world. I seek “...those from whom one mostly does not distinguish oneself. Those among whom one is, too” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 111).

I invited nine women sailors to help open the way into my question. They were Sal, Anne, Barney, Linda, Gloria, Cindy, Dee, Donna, and Gina. Sal and Anne’s names are pseudonyms for their given names. These women came into my life by responding to my call, an invitation to share, which I sent into the world two ways.

First, through a voice of a mutual friend, a group of Seattle sailing women heard about my research and suggested I spend time with them. I traveled to Washington State and there, in a single gathering, I came to meet and share

conversations among five mid-life cruising women. Listening in conversation to their tales about living on board sailboats, I was particularly drawn to the stories of two participants, Sal and Anne, and it is their experiences that I used in this study.

Second, through an advertisement in a local sailing magazine, I called out to women in the Annapolis, Maryland area. I solicited the participation of women from 40 to 60 years of age, currently living on board a sailboat, and who have actively sailed a boat across a large body of water within the last year to join me on a journey to meaning. An honorarium was offered to this group of women to help ensure their participation in a series of conversations. A sample of the advertisement is included in Appendix A.

Winter callings. Our conversations took place in both Seattle and the Annapolis area during the winter of 2003. The winter, I found, was the best time of year to experience unobstructed views of sea places. In winter, there is no foliage to block the view, and people can be found in predictable warm places, their boats. The winter climate also made the act of conversation a welcoming diversion to those who inhabit a boat's solitary environments.

Living on the water in the winter of 2003 was an extreme experience that enriched our conversational encounters in important ways. This may have been because being cooped up indoors in small spaces for long periods of time can cause a condition called "cabin fever." The antidote for this "ailment" was discovered by Native Alaskans during their winter months. This physiological "upset" was cured by spending more time visiting and enjoying small talk with others. The art of

conversation made them great talkers and jokers, and kept “cabin fever” at bay (Gallagher, 1993). Perhaps my participants were suffering from cabin fever as my experience with them during the very cold winter of 2003 resulted in lively, heart-felt, open, and lengthy conversations.

The conversations also were helped by the extreme conditions of the winter months. Extreme conditions heighten survival instincts in people. As they work to survive in less than hospitable conditions, people are distilled to their very essence. “We’re relieved of petty concerns and the monotony of the routine. We feel an immediate sense of purpose and the value of life...” (Gallagher, 1993, p. 96). The Annapolis winter of 2003 was harsh for live aboards. Boat hulls were routinely encapsulated in ice which had to be chipped away to prevent the hull from being crushed as the ice hardened. On the colder days, electric space heaters were used inside the boats. The introduction of heat against the cold “skin” of the hull caused “rain” from condensation to form inside the boats. The damp, cool interiors challenged their spirits as they tried to keep warm and dry.

The winter in Seattle was grey and rainy. Though they did not have the ice and snow to contend with, Sal and Anne had fog, darkness by 4:30 in the afternoon, and rain most everyday. This made for a dreary and depressing climate, a condition that caused more than a few sailors to return to the land to wait it out. The women who chose to live on their boats in these conditions are unique. The winter of 2003 brought me to know that women who have chosen the sea way are, without a doubt, extraordinary women living an extreme life.

Seeking them. Only through conversations am I able to hear my thoughts, because conversation is a “thinking out loud” process. By talking my thoughts out loud with these women, I was able to become reacquainted with my self. Reading in solitude from a printed page about the experiences of others only partially reveals the meaning of this lived way. Talking and being with the others who are living the phenomenon, listening with my whole being, and hearing my response begins a chain reaction that illuminates. To witness their unfolding, requires that I listen with my whole being (D. Levin, 1989). If active listening is practiced with earnest, one is exhausted at the stopping point.

The tape recorded voices of the women in conversation with me became my precious gift. Reflected in their voiced experiences, the energy of their beings began to unravel the secrets of this lived way. This, then, became the gift I returned to them. Their precious gifts captured on tape became appreciated all the more when our first set of tape recordings were lost due to the careless act of a transcriptionist with whom they were entrusted. The first recordings of conversations with five of the women were lost forever. The four remaining recordings were spared because I elected to transcribe them myself. The loss of the tapes elicited my anger and then a sense of guilt for having lost the precious object that had been entrusted to me. I was the caretaker and amplifier for the meaning revealed about these women’s chosen way; it was my job to give voice to their lived experience. To have lost the recordings of our first conversations struck me as a great personal failure. It was as if the entire

community of cruising women had been silenced, and the shame of having been party to this silencing distressed me.

I confessed the loss of the tapes to the five affected participants, and true to the spirit of the cruising community, they worked with me to turn a tragedy into an opportunity. The positive aspect of this unfortunate event meant that I had to arrange for additional conversations with them, thus giving us more of an opportunity to get to know each other. Using our notes taken during the “lost” conversation, we were able to begin where we left off. The synchronicity of life suggests that there are no accidental acts; rather, according to the laws of a greater power, events occur as “meaningful coincidences” (Hopcke, 1997, p. 18). In retrospect, I believe this is true. Thanks to the loss, my opportunity to develop a closer relationship with my participants was possible, which deepened subsequent conversations. Celebrating the synchronicity of life, we were able to find meaning in the loss.

What is the Question?

The question these women were helping to unfurl, unwrap or lay bare with me was and is, **“What is the lived experience of mid-life women who have chosen the sea way as sailor”?** This is a question that calls for descriptions of everydayness lived by women in the sailing community. My conversations around their experiences, of living aboard a sailboat, were unstructured exchanges, not willed or persuaded. As Gadamer (1960/1989) instructs, an exchange is a wandering journey that yields an opening that reveals. We peel back layers of knowing, eventually stopping when participants are emptied. No preconceived ideas enter the process, for

that would make it a constructed telling, yielding reduced meaning. Conversations with each woman were handled as a gentle encouragement because revealing meaning is a delicate, sacred experience.

Conversations Everywhere

I first met with the group of five mid-life women sailors from Washington at a local Seattle sailing club. After telling the individuals in the group the purpose of the study and obtaining their written consent (See Appendix B) to participate in the research, I engaged them in a collective conversation about their experiences of living on a boat. The group's two hours of collective sharing encouraged the opening of the phenomenon. To get the conversation underway, I used some opening questions such as, "When did you arrive at the decision to live on a boat? Did you make the decision alone? Was timing a factor? What events were going on in your life when you made this decision? What would you like people to know about your way of living? What has this allowed you to express or realize about yourself?" Current anecdotes that led to a description of day to day events were encouraged. I asked, "Tell me a story about a most significant remembrance on one of your early sailing trips." I also asked about current family members and if any of them have expressed feelings about this chosen life style. I tried to keep the conversations experiential by asking, "What things currently going on in your life make the sea life right for you?"

The conversations flowed easily, but it was the stories of two participants, Sal and Anne, that called me to further reflection as captured in the words of this study. "We can be affected by a story as much as we can by a dream if its symbol and events

have a certain mystery and power for us that in turn evoke our own memories and thoughts” (Bolen, 1994, p. 127).

I next met with seven individual women in the Annapolis area and engaged each of them in a minimum of two, two hour conversations. Those whose tapes had been lost participated in three, two hour conversations. We joined voices on each woman’s sailing vessel, with the exception of Cindy’s conversations which took place in her art studio on two occasions. Having had at least one conversation on board their boats enhanced their memories and set a tone for the purpose of the research. After I shared the purpose of the study and obtained their written consent to participate in the research, I engaged each in conversation about their experiences. As I had not met the women before, the opening questions used with the Seattle group helped get the conversations underway.

After the first meeting with the Annapolis area women, I invited the participants to write some thoughts or reflections about the meaning they derived from their “place” on the sea. I collected their work at the second conversation. Four of the women provided me with various forms of expression. Barney gave me original writings from her sea journal as well as some drawings and family photographs. Gina shared a draft of an article describing her sailing voyage from Norfolk to Florida. Dee provided informative journal articles and publications which she had gathered just for me. Cindy shared private thoughts about the images in her paintings. Donna gave me a cookbook and copies of her favorite recipes. Linda

shared photographs of sailing ships and children. These writings and expressions of self become a visual text that helped to open the phenomenon.

During the second meeting with each Annapolis area participant, I shared the essential themes that emerged following our first meeting. As themes are mutually “picked fruit” (van Manen, 1990, p. 100) generated from the conversational relation, I asked each of them to ponder the themes further as together we continued the process of mutual interpretation of their meaning. We said them out loud, construed and clarified their meaning, or omitted them if their sounds no longer rang true. Mutual reflection brings to light the limits of our own present vision and helps us to transcend to new views (van Manen, 1990). We need the Other (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 67) to do that.

A third conversational exchange occurred with five of the Annapolis area women whose first audio tapes had been lost. Together, we considered the themes of our second conversation by reading the typed transcripts together. This allowed for deeper unearthing of the themes and my connections with the women became stronger as a result. Fourth conversations occurred with Barney, Donna, Cindy and Gina to clarify specific meanings and continue the enjoyment of our new relationship.

The time of day the conversations occurred varied depending on what was the “right moment” for the individual to share with me. It was important that each participant felt at ease, so I attempted to find times when the pressures of the day to day were over or when significant others were not around. For the Seattle group, our meeting time was after work. For the Annapolis area women, the time for

conversation occurred most often in the evening except for Linda, Gloria, and Gina who preferred the morning hours. As the women were respectful of the process for deep conversational sharing, they ensured there were few interruptions of our time together. At times this was difficult, for Barney, Gloria and Donna's husbands were usually on their boats when I arrived. My gratitude goes out to their husbands who supported our work by "going out to find something to do" while we women met for hours at a time. Heidegger reminds us that time is an "...endless, irreversible succession of nows passing away and arising from the temporality of entangled *Dasein*" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 390). Time together is being together.

The conversation with the Seattle group and the conversations with each Annapolis woman lasted approximately two hours each. It usually took that long before saturation occurred, causing our thoughts to become silent. Saturation was reached through a mutual unsaying and knowing that no more would be revealed right now. Topic diversion occurred on occasions when uncomfortable issues were raised. This was an expected occurrence when sharing life experiences, and the women asked the tape recorder be turned off to accommodate such times.

All conversations were audio taped and transcribed into written form by me. Then, the transcriptions were scrutinized by both my self and the women. The Seattle women's transcripts were mailed to them via the post or Email, and the transcripts for the women in the Annapolis area were hand carried by me to their boats.

I received guidance with theme identification by reading van Manen (1990). He advised that the groundings of the life world follow four fundamental existential

themes that enabled us to hear the themes as they called out. Named “existentials” (van Manen, 1990, p. 101), these fundamental themes provided a guide for our theme identification when using phenomenological methodology. The guiding “existentials” are lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relation.

The essential themes found in the all the transcriptions were first named by me. I then highlighted them in the text of the transcripts for the women to read. Then we discussed and concurred whether these themes contained a “quality or aspect that makes a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1990, p. 107). The way I determined the essential nature of a theme was to take it away from the phenomenon, that is, apply a “process of free imaginative variation” (p. 107) by which I imagined the theme absent from the phenomenon being studied. Then, I asked myself and the women, “Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?” (p. 107). If it did, the theme was considered essential.

Other themes, not considered to be essential also appeared in the transcriptions. They were pursued if it was felt that they lent themselves to the focus of the study. They provided depth to an “essential” theme that I or the women involved considered worth exploring further. They also were pursued because they introduced an idea or feeling that captivated both researcher and participant.

Questions Abound

My exposure to the recounted lived ways written in Chapter One and Two and the process of questioning Others has begun my wandering within my own question. I

am caught up in this methodology of meaning-making as I reflect upon what I have heard. I sense a deepening of meaning as I enter my question equipped with the insights of others. I need “those among whom I am one, too” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 111) in order to come to meaning. I know now that others share my questioning ways.

“Barbara’s Questions”

Does the sea journey reveal the meaning, or
does the meaning reveal the journey?
Is the mid-life woman herself the journey to meaning?

Does the sea journey reveal soul existing, or
does the sea journey shape the soul evolving?
Is the soul both existing and evolving at the same time?

Are we creating soulful ways, or
are we exposing the soul’s way?
Can we affect the way of the soul through the journey to meaning? (Schaefer, 2002)

What in my life has brought me to this moment of questioning? Using phenomenological methodology to inquire about the meaning of life is a scholarly way of coming to know about being in the world. Will this effort bring me to know a more enlightened way of being? To live enlightened means we waste not a moment and consider the ways of everydayness in the experience of the journey. I feel a void in my knowledge about the meaning of being in the world. I sense a dearth of wasted moments, and I cry for pause. Am I alone with these feelings? Do I engage in this questioning only for myself, or are others curious, too?

I came to this research to connect with my sailing community and become wise with them. It is time to stop my inauthentic ways (Heidegger, 1953/1996) and

begin an enlightened journey with a horizontal view that is ever opening and expanding, a journey that includes the Other (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 67) as we, together, voyage to meaning.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE JOURNEY CALLS

Hearkening To The Call

A journey is a traveling way through the ineffable passages of life. Life passages are places experienced by beings moving through physical space. Life places are temporal, geographical, sensory, and human (Gallagher, 1993). Women are called to journey and explore life's ways as they appear in each of these places of being. To hear the call is a choice to know our life intimately through an exploration of the synchronicitous relationship between being and place. Mid-life journeys are undertaken by curious women seeking the ineffable meaning of that relationship. It is a relationship of meaning revealed through a being's exploration of her lived time, lived space, lived body and lived human relation (van Manen, 1990).

Hearing a call is a "response to the claim of another...It is not a claim of presence but of absence, not of identity but of difference" (Hultgren, 1994, p. 22). To respond to a call is to follow the invisible urgings of another way, one that "speaks to the possible" (Hultgren, p. 23). To hear a call authentically means to prepare oneself for connections with Others as we become "participants in a conversational community" (Lashley, Neal & Slunt, 1994, p. 198). To be called is to be called forth as a being, but even more compelling to our soul is the act of being "called by" (Huebner, 1999, p. 380). The call to journey is to be called to join the Other (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 67). "They travel as much to meet other travelers as they do to see the world" (Gelman, 2001, p. 17). We are called to sea to be in the company of other sailors.

Voyaging on the sea is a traveling journey; it is a journey of extremes for extra ordinary people. Previous conversations with Becky, a voyaging woman, in Chapter Two, illuminate her understanding of the experience found in the extreme lived environment of sailing women. She calls to me.

You know, Barbara, we cruisers were just a bunch of ordinary people doing extra ordinary things. When you are out there, you don't think about the danger and near misses. We do what we must to survive...Being so close to Nature with no comforts to make me soft, makes me think that it must have been a hard life. I know it is not for everyone, but no matter how hard it got, I know I would not have traded those six years on board with my husband with anyone. (personal journal, November, 2002)

While Becky might consider herself ordinary, the journey of these women is most extraordinary. Their journey comes with risks, yet it offers them adventures to reshape their lives (Huebner, 1999).

This chapter introduces the voyaging women and the way in which they were called to the sea. They, in turn, offer their own calls for us to journey with them. Rising above the noise and complex daily ways of the world, their calls, if understood and acknowledged, reveal the goal, that which we seek (Huebner, 1999). My goal is to understand the meaning of their lived experiences as sailors to shed light on this point in time for women--mid-life.

I am reminded that throughout literature, sea metaphors serve as powerful natural vehicles to help express life's meaning. The simple, yet, extreme ways of the sea expose the eccentric everyday lived ways of its inhabiting women. We consider our own voyage as we "hearken" (D. Levin, 1989, p. 48) to their voices, and we

wonder what lies ahead for each of us. Meet the muses and how they were called to the seaway.

Sea Muses

I am like Menmosyne, the mother of the muses, who leads each muse through active remembering of dreams, myths, fantasies, work and lived ways at sea. I, am an embodied Menmosyne who

...selects and organizes the past putting into context what is recollected. Sometimes she pays close attention to what was lived with intensity, and other times she selects events which seem unimportant and illuminates upon them with a depth which can not be denied or explained. (Parada, n.d.)

The muses are our souls' voices, and when our memories are evoked, an urge to journey to meaning ensues. "By sharing the stories of our personal journeys and telling of our encounters" (Bolen, 1994, p. 5), our collective callings return missing ways of being in the world and lead to its transformation. The calls from the muses reach me on the wind. I hear the reverberations of their voices like the orchestral sounds of the wind in the rigging; a symphony of compelling sounds draws me in. "The muse is both a deity and a messenger, is the one who makes demands and brings the gifts, is the one who inspires the work of art" (Metzger, 1992, p. 190). An inspired work of art is the becoming of our creative self, and "...under the tutelage of the muse, we go into the world naked, but that is what the creative requires, for how else can we see what we must, be sensitive to what exists, and also present our work in a truthful manner" (Metzger, 1992, p. 190)? Our work is the shaping of our emerging, creative being which is transformed through the call of the muse.

The women participants in my study call to me with the voices of the muses; Sal, Anne, Barney, Linda, Gloria, Dee, Cindy, Donna, and Gina, unite in song to create a chorus of meaning for this ready listener. Minor editorial changes have been made in the selected excerpts shared from each of the women for the purpose of clarity and readability.

“The Muses Call”

Call to me.
 Send out the song.
 We listen with bodily ears, but
 they do not hearken.
 To hear the place between land and sea,
 only souls can hearken.
 The vibration of in-between places creates a wail
 That only the ready hear. (Schaefer, 2003)

“Sing to me of the man [sic], Muse, the man of twists and turns driven time and again off course...Launch out on this story, Muse, daughter of Zeus, start from where you will...” (Homer, R. Fagles trans., 1989). The muses sing the story of the twists and turns of remembered ways experienced on a woman’s journey. It is this call shared with me and others that will lead us safely “there.”

The Muses Call: A Harkening to the Sea

Hearing the call of others, our ears become organs of being, and from that attunement, “We shall learn some new ways to respond to the nihilism of our time” (D. Levin, 1989, p. 208). Hearing enables us to belong to the wholeness of being in the world and establishes our sense of self-formation and spiritual being; it allows the sound of the journey’s call to bind us together in a sea-world matrix.

Matrix means “womb” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 463), a place that harbors life. To be bound in the matrix of the sea-world means to be in a life forming place. If we listen with our bodies and hear each other in the intimacy of this matrix, we can not help but belong to life. To hear the other and learn the meaning of their lives is to hear with a child’s joy of belonging (D. Levin, 1989) as we are gently drawn to the child’s songs.

“Hearing belongs to the sonorous field of Being” (D. Levin, 1989, p. 206). We listen with our ears, but the gifts of the audible are appreciated in the world of our inner dwelling places (D. Levin). When we lend our ears to appreciate the musing of others and our listening becomes properly tuned and thoughtful (D. Levin), it becomes “authentic hearing” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 271), and this is the achievement of hearkening.

Farrer (1991) studied the lives of Apache Indians and the way their calls, storied in songs, were used to sing others through the changes of their lives. The act of calling out recreated and reinforced the essential harmony and balance of the universe. The singers sang for life itself, and the ones who heard their songs were forever changed. Mid-life sea women sing the stories of their lives in relation to the sea. In their songs are the stories of their lives and the ways they have come to create harmony and balance. They sing for all who hearken to their calls for balance in the world. The work of this research serves as a rendering of what we have come to know through the call of the muses.

Sal. Sal is a White woman from the United States. She is first a sailor, but she earns her livelihood as a computer programmer. She and her husband have lived on board boats for 13 years and together have owned four. They currently live on a 27 foot *C&C* sailboat that is moored to a dock in the Seattle harbor. They are both employed on the land to enrich their “cruising kitty” which will enable them, in the near future, to cruise the Pacific Rim. Her husband is a geologist, and together they share an interest in observing “live” volcanoes located in the coastal places of the Pacific Ocean.

Sal is 45 years old. She describes what fueled her transition to the live-a-board life: “In the late 1980’s West Seattle was being infiltrated by gangs. Our car was broken into and bad stuff started happening. One day we said, ‘Let’s get out of here’.” It was then they sold their house and moved on board the boat. The call of “Let’s get out of here” also echoes in the voices of Gloria, Linda and Gina. Escapees to the sea, they all cry out for another place of being in the world.

Anne. Anne, a White woman from the United States, is 48 and has been living on board her 40 foot *Valiant* since 1992 along with her husband and two daughters. The family took a year off to sail to Mexico and Hawaii. Returning to the Pacific Northwest area, they have positioned themselves for their next voyage to Alaska. Anne and her husband reside on the boat, while their girls live away at college. Anne is animate that “I will never leave this boat.” She echoes the calls of Barney and Gina who also consider their boat as a forever place. Anne wants to keep the boat in her life so she can “take off at any time,” and like Barney, Gloria, and Dee, she wants to

be “ready to go.” She and her husband are currently working in Seattle as they prepare the boat for future cruising.

Barney. Barney is a shortened version of the name Barbara, my name, and it is used by a petite White woman from the United States of 52 years whose past career was that of an occupational therapist. She is married and a mother of two grown children. Her boat, a 43 foot *Endeavour*, is shared with her husband. They have been living on board for three years. When I first met her, she and her husband had recently arrived in Annapolis by boat. They were planning on making this a “stopping-off place” on their way south to the Bahamas where they will stay for an indefinite period of time. “Stopping-off” places enable them to work for a brief time to replenish cruising funds and visit with family and friends. Barney currently is employed as the ticket taker and bar tender on the Annapolis tourist boat, the Harbor Queen.

Linda. Linda is a 41-year-old White sea captain from the United States who is licensed to skipper vessels up to 100 tons. She makes her living teaching sailing to others or delivering sailboats to owners in distant locations. She spent most of her childhood days with her family on boats in the Chesapeake Bay. She says, as a child, she lived on the land, but was “raised on the water.” She comes from a boating family; her parents cruise on a sailboat that is currently in the Bahamas. As an adult, Linda wanted to live on a boat, but her husband was not so inclined. This difference of opinion was perhaps not the sole reason, but it certainly was a factor leading to

their divorce. Her two children aged 9 and 18 live on the land, and the youngest lives with her former husband.

Captain Linda is a “salty lady.” She is so natural in this salt water environment that she seems to be of the sea. Her voice is loud and boisterous and carries across the water like a cannon shot. She yells her call to me from her 27 foot *Watkin* sailboat docked in Harve de Grace, Maryland; I would have to be deaf not to hear her.

Gloria. At 46 years of age, Gloria is well into her fourth chronological decade. Her choice of home is a 40 foot sailboat built by her Australian husband, Collin. The boat was docked in Harve de Grace, Maryland at the time of our conversations. Gloria is a Black African woman who, until three years ago, lived in her homeland, Zimbabwe, Africa. While working as a nurse in the United Kingdom, she met Colin through a mutual friend. Three years ago they married, and for her honeymoon, she took her first sea voyage on board her new home. They sailed to the Mediterranean Sea; she recalls the experience of her first sea voyage.

For someone born in Africa, sailing was an incredible experience; I had never been to the sea. African girls just do not go to sea. My family thought I had lost my marbles...but, sailing opens a different world to you. You start to feel feelings. We started our voyage in Cyprus, and by the fifth week, the experience was horrifying. I was so sick I could not keep anything down. I thought it was all over for me, but then the sickness passed, and I was ready to go. (Gloria)

Compared to the other sea muses, Gloria is a novice sailor, but her capacity to “feel feelings” and her impulse of being “ready to go” made her an insightful participant in

this study. Gloria and Collin are currently at sea voyaging to Collin's homeland, Australia, which they hope to reach in the fall of 2003.

Dee. Dee is a 53-year-old White sailor from the United States who lives alone aboard a 30 foot *Catalina* named Menemsha II at a dock in Arnold, Maryland.

Menemsha is the Mother God of the Algonquin Indians. It is also the name of her first landfall which she made as a 17 year old sailor.

I took the name because it was my first land fall. I was sailing for the first time on a big boat out of Mystic to Block Island to Martha's Vineyard. We came out of the fog, and there she was. The island was right there. It was an incredible experience. You are traveling all day and can not see more than one hundred feet in any direction, and, suddenly, the fog lifts, and there is the island.

Impressions from childhood are lived imprints on her being. They serve as Dee's foundation for this chosen way. Nurtured by parents, who were also of the sea, and married to an avid sailor, Dee has had a lifetime of sailing experiences. In fact, she and her husband planned the building of her first boat together. After his untimely death in 1980, Dee continued the sailing dream, and built the boat herself. Boats have been the vehicles of her life journey ever since.

Trained as an aerospace engineer who worked on the moon project, Dee retired in 1992 to undertake more entrepreneurial efforts to replenish her "cruising kitty." She prides herself on being able to live on a modest income of \$15,000 per year. She "feeds the kitty" by working as a part-time nanny, consultant for "want to be cruisers," and a Certified Nursing Assistant. She says that she will never return to engineering because the time commitment is too rigid. To cruise full time, she seeks jobs that are short-term and provide scheduling flexibility so she can "take off for the

sea” when the sailing season begins. She, too, feels the need always to be “ready to go.” She particularly is pleased with her recently acquired nursing assistant certification as it provides her with opportunity to obtain steady short-term work, flexible hours and “kitty” food. For an indefinite period of time, she plans to continue her annual cruising pattern of voyaging south along the East Coast to the Bahamas and back to the Annapolis area.

Cindy. Cindy is a 42-year-old White sailor from the United States who lives on board her 20-year-old, 47 foot sailing *ketch*. A ketch is a form of sailing ship built with a second mast located on the aft deck of the vessel. *Ketch* means “to ensnare or capture” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 411). This place of being, captured the imaginations of both Cindy and her husband, a sail maker. The boat is their home and is both a vehicle for sailing and living. They bought the sailboat second hand and currently are renovating the inside to make it “just right.”

Cindy has been living on sailboats since she was 18 years old. She is woman of many interests and balances her sea time with oil painting, teaching ice skating, participating in aquatic and land sports, and custom painting names on boat hulls. This 42-year-old, sailing, and skating, artist has revealed new meaning to the word *balance* as she juggles the multiple activities of her mid-life at sea.

Donna. Donna is a 57-year-old White cruising woman from Canada who has lived on board sailboats with her Greek born husband, Cosmos, for over eight years. They began this cruising life in the 1970s when they took a seven-year voyage to the Caribbean and Europe. After that voyage, they came back to land to work for awhile,

returning to the sea again in 2002. Last December, while in route south to the Bahamas, they detoured to Annapolis to undergo engine repairs. They currently live on board a 55 foot *Morgan Out Island* sailboat located at a dock in Annapolis.

Like me, Donna has no children. Her family consists of relatives who live in both Canada and Greece. To maintain relationships with family and friends, Donna and Cosmos had spent most of their time cruising between the Mediterranean Sea and the East Coast of the United States. They do not have a land-based house that they call home. *Koukla*, their boat, is their permanent residence. Recently, however, they acquired Canadian property in Alberta, and Donna, in the distant future, sees herself returning to this land place to live half of the year; the other half will be spent living on the boat.

Gina. Gina is a White woman from the United States and an experienced cruiser who has lived aboard boats for eight years. She currently resides on a 38 foot *Pearson* with her husband. Previous home ports include Key West, Florida and Norfolk, Virginia. She is docked in Annapolis because both she and her husband have land jobs there. Gina is 48 years old and does not yet have enough money saved to be a full time cruiser, so she works as a legal secretary. This is Gina's second marriage; her first marriage ended in divorce. Her desire to live on a sailboat full-time was not the sole factor prompting her divorce, but it was a factor affecting her decision to allow her son, aged 13, to live on land with his father in a "very nice house." Now, his time is divided between the land and sea life. Gina's stories about her cruising life relay the unspoken significance of her lived experiences. Over the course of our time

together, she continually reminded me, “You have to experience it, Barbara. When you get ‘out there,’ then you will see what I am talking about. You have to live the life to understand what it means.” This was her phenomenological mantra spoken to me during our time together.

Tea or Coffee - Conversations with the Muses

In the vocabulary of the sea way, my muses are called “cruisers.” To cruise is to “cross over” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 175). These women are “crossing over” beings who, through conversation, have joined me in uncovering the meaning of crossing over to the sea life during mid-life.

Each conversation began with the ritual of preparing tea or coffee. It became a symbolic, refreshing gesture that marked the beginning of each exchange. The ritual of sharing drink mirrored our upcoming sharing of thoughts. The warmth of the fluid helped warm our shared space. *Rituals* are familiar “religious ceremonies, customs, or rites” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 667). To begin an event with a ritual marks it as a sincere occasion. Though our conversations were spontaneous and enjoyed with much laughter, they were also sincere encounters. *Sincere* conversations are ones “of growth” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 721). Our time of sharing became our time of growing together.

Customs provide routine patterning in our life and give it a familiar feel. The comfort of a ritual’s repeating ways assures us that the ensuing event will have lasting meaning. I see the care given to the preparation of a “just for me” cup of coffee fixed

“just the way I like it.” It is a familiar ceremony, and when I hold the inviting cup in my hands and feel the steam on my face, it feels like the warmth of an old friendship.

“My Muses”

They know something that I do not know.
 They are who I want to be.
 They are going where I want to go.
 I call to them and they called back to me. (Schaefer, 2003)

My time with the women began in conversation and ended in friendship. Like all cruising experiences with others, when the encounter is over, we depart each other's company knowing we may never see each other again. How little I knew of this life when I started, and after sharing experiences with them, how knowing I have become. So filled with their songs, I am called to share their meaning because that is the task of those who come to a knowing way.

The Callings of the Muses

Our conversations are remembered by me forever as I recall themes the muses voiced. “Themes are like stars to navigate by” (van Manen, 1990, p. 90). Each star became a “going to” place on my journey to meaning. Meaning unfolded as they responded to my question, “What is the lived experience of mid-life women who choose the sea way as sailor”? Their callings are remembered phrases captured in my mind, each mined to uncover the meaning of their mid-life choice of being in this sea world.

Sal Calls: “Nature Shapes You”

Sal is an evolving woman and she credits Nature as having shaped her personhood. She demonstrates this feeling with a expressed attitude, “If you don't

like my way of doing a task, that is fine, but, I have made it through a hurricane, have you?” Nature has exposed her to fearful natural events, such as hurricane force winds and erupting volcanoes. Giving her confidence in her knowing self, sailing through and around these environmental events has affected her way of being in the world. Living in Nature as a sailor, it seems, has indeed transformed and shaped her way of being.

The Seattle area is known for scenic beauty. It provides Sal sensory encounters with snowcapped mountains, ocean, and exotic wild life, such as sea lions, porpoises and whales. Seattle is her named place of residence, but Nature is the place of her being in the world. Living in her sea home, Sal is surrounded by an intense force whose extreme moods and beauty hold her in awe. On a boat at sea, she feels a connection with Nature that places her in the “heart of God.”

Nature’s being. Nature is more than a place inhabited by Sal. Nature reveals a way of being in place that challenges her. Sal recalls an experience where she was in hurricane force winds. It was dangerous to be at sea, yet she spoke with pride about how she met the challenge of both being in Nature and sailing her “home” back to Seattle.

We had our full main sail up, and when we got out of the lee of the shore, the boat accelerated to 15 knots...We surfed to Kingston. We found out later that it was blowing 70 knots of winds (hurricane force). We were not damaged. Some companion boats suffered minor damage, but we had no one hurt. (Sal)

The limitless, natural sea challenges the traditional locations prescribed for women by a patriarchal society (Pagh, 2001). It provides women with an extraordinary way of being in the world.

Gina, another muse, suggests that women are not just “in” Nature, they are part “of” Nature. To be “of” Nature means, “Nature accepts us as part of its mighty force. That is why we do not fear the sea and are instead drawn to it.” Women naturally are attracted to accepting beings, and women seek Nature as place because they feel that bond of mutual acceptance.

Other bonds connect us to Nature’s being. Sal talks about her concern to keep Nature safe from the overpowering polluting forces that threaten to engulf Her. “I am trying to have the smallest impact on the earth. I use biodegradable soap to wash my dishes. I take a shower on shore, so I don’t pollute the water.” To limit her use of electrical appliances that burn fossil fuels, she avoids over-dependence on land based power sources. Both women and Nature provide inexhaustible life to the world, and both live under the threat of individual extinction through engulfment (van Boheemen, 1987). Nature is our sea mother with whom women share a common threat, the loss of self to outside, overbearing, and polluting patriarchal forces. Sal’s way of knowing and caring about Mother Ocean reveals a bond with Nature that is more than a unique place to challenge the female gender. To Sal, She is a member of our sisterhood; She is family.

Nature is Mother Ocean. As our bodies are primarily made up of water, Gina knows women share the same genetic make up as Mother Ocean. She concludes, “It is more natural to be part of the sea than the land.” We are family in the deepest sense because we both are filled with the same life giving force, water. Linda concurs, “Water is my natural place, and I feel more natural in the water than on the

land. This is my origin, where I grew up.” Gloria, on the other hand, states that we do not belong to the sea. Rather, sailors are like sea birds and “Anything that flies must land.” In Gloria’s mind, sailors belong to the land, and at journey’s end, we all return there. Gloria says, “I do not want to be on the sea forever. There are times I want to go to land and stretch my legs and mix with the world; humans need that.”

Both perspectives about our being “of the sea” or “of the land” illuminate and deepen the meaning of being in Nature. Women of the sea way know that time spent floating is temporary, but, even so, it can be a time of shaping as we bond with a force greater than our selves. Women also know at some point the voyage at sea ends, and that is the “time to land” in the unique places of our “going to.”

Sal views Mother Ocean from her boat and reflects on the continuous cycle of life she sees from her sea place.

The thing that really impressed me while I am cruising is that I get to experience the circle of life. Salmon lay thousands of eggs. Out of 100,000 eggs, one will mature to spawn to start the cycle over again. So, the big fish eat the eggs and the fingerlings, the birds eat the fry and adult fish, and when the adult salmon come to spawn and die, the bears and eagles eat the dead fish. The bear pulls the dead fish into the forest, eats it and enters the nutrients into the forest dirt. There is a bounty in nature and everyone gets a little section of it as life matures and the cycle continues. (Sal)

A woman’s lived life is “like the cycles of life in nature...one of death, decay, gestation and rebirth” (Murdock, 1990, p. 108). The circular journey of giving life and ending life is part of the panorama Sal experiences at sea. To watch the creation and demise of new life is to witness life’s greatest dramas. By just glancing out her portholes, Sal becomes a witness to the continual renewal of life. Being surrounded by continuous birthing is to experience nurturing yourself. Murdock (1990) suggests

that during mid-life, women seek to spend more time in Nature so as to be “nurtured by the earth” (p. 8). Sea women know Mother Ocean helps them come to know the meaning of continual emergence, and to be engulfed in that place, makes us part of the dramatic unfolding of life.

Nature’s sensuous being. Dee helped me come to know that to be in Nature at sea is to be “touched by the wind brushing your cheek or ruffling the hairs on the back of your neck.” These sensual cues enable women to “sail by feel.” Nature is a sensuous being that caresses our exposed skin by brushing our cheek or neck with her breath. She kisses our exposed surfaces with her dew and rain. To be in Nature is to be loved. When we close our eyes to accept Her embrace, we are able to steer our vessels by feel because we know the direction of our being in relation to Her. “The sensory touch of the Natural world” (Dee) can move your vessel to new places of being.

Nature shapes our being on so many levels. She alters us intellectually as our “life cycle” teacher; emotionally she is a sensuous other who reaches our soul; physically we relate to her as a fellow water being sharing common concerns about overbearing world ways. To know such a Being and to share Her space is to be one with Her and experience the meaning of being in a place you never want to leave.

Anne Calls: “Nature, a Place to Never Leave”

To convey the meaning of being in Nature, Anne tells a story about her sailing voyage to Hawaii. She describes a portion of her 20 day passage taken with her husband and two children.

No one wanted to stop; everyone wanted to keep going. We were really excited about the land fall, for the experience of it, but, they (her family) just wanted to keep going. Right before we made land fall, we were going through the self doubt stage of “What do we do if we hit the land?” alternating with “Oh my god, what if we miss it?”... Six o’clock the next morning, we could see Hawaii on the horizon; it was beautiful and there were two beautiful rainbows outlining the island for us. It was very emotional for everybody. It made me realize how insignificant we were. Nature just kind of comes into balance out there. (Anne)

We hear Anne’s call and feel her experience of being in Nature’s ocean. Being in Nature is seeing double rainbows, fearing both hitting and missing land, and desiring to “just keep going” forever. Donna also recalls the need to go on forever as she shares her feelings of her second Atlantic crossing:

The trip going over was just so pleasant, but then, we were there. We were not ready for it to be over already. We were not ready to go to land. We were not in a hurry to return to land.

Anne, her family, and Donna were not ready to reach Gloria’s described place where “Anything that flies must land.” Landing is for another time; it is not what mid-life sailors seek.

The place of Nature is an emotional “being in” experience that exceeds human expectations and language. It is a place where words are inadequate to capture its “whatness” (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). As Anne and Donna convey, the meaning of being in this ineffable place of the sea is best described as a place never to leave. It is a place of rainbows and more pleasant ways of being.

Wind: Nature’s invisible place. When the wind blows from the south it pushes Barney’s boat away from the dock, straining her ties to the land. The warm air originates from her invisible, far away, “going to” place. It caresses and calls to her as

she lies marooned in her winter place of “stopping-off.” Rocking them in waves of contentment, Nature’s breath carries a sigh reminding women of their “going to” places, away from the docks of the everyday. With Her wind, she nudges us toward the sea way. As the wind picks up, we hear Her urging us to not “stop-off” too long, for, life in Nature is about emergence and that requires moving our vessels south, to new places.

Barney remarks on the sound of the wind, “I hear the wind, isn’t it wonderful?” Donna says, “I prefer to not live with noise. The cruising life allows for you to only have to listen to the wind.” Both are drawn to the essence of the soundless noise of the wind, moving air. The invisible force of Nature that reaches us with touch and sound is “in the invisible depths of the air itself, in the thickness of the very medium that flows within us and all around us” (Abram, 1996, p. 227). “She rushes into our lungs with every breath and becomes part of our physical being...I cannot act, cannot speak, and cannot think a single thought without the participation of this fluid element. I am immersed in its depths as surely as fish are immersed in the sea” (p. 225). At sea, beings succumb to the wind which takes over our bodies and moves our vessels. Air unites our bodies with the ocean. It is the soul of the horizon, “the secret realm from whence all beings draw their nourishment” (p. 226). As if it composed the essence of their very breath, sea women are hungrily drawn to the silent callings of Nature’s wind. They know without it their vessels go nowhere.

Sky: Nature’s visible place. Why do these women choose to “get their dresses wet” (Pagh, 2001, p.117) in this water world? Perhaps the view of heaven is

so compelling from the sea that they can not pull themselves away. Linda questions, “Where else can I lie back, look out the door at the stars, and see an eagle?” Donna says, “You see marvelous sunsets.” Gina remembers “sleeping under the stars and watching the sun come up.” Barney looks at the sky every day knowing, “What goes on up there matters.” Anne recalls her daughter’s daily search of the sky to see “which way the wind is coming from.”

Like the ancients, they gaze into the heavens to see the non-stop show whose next act affects their being in so many ways. Their sea ways have taught them how to use the visible forms of Nature’s sky such as birds, sun, moon, stars, and clouds to read messages from the earth. Messages of the past and future are read in skyward events. Rainbows and bright sun tell of past storms, memories from which important lessons can be applied to future voyages. Bright stars or billowing clouds predict the atmosphere of the upcoming day. The sky is our very own crystal ball, hovering over our heads informing us of past and future life events. Attentive sailors learn to read the sky like the Bible as it tells them that which has come to pass and that which will come to pass, and occasionally, just like in the Bible, a miracle occurs of which we can not believe our eyes. *Moxsun*, Barney’s boat, is named after one of these miracles.

MOXSUN is the name of my boat and is fashioned from the words “mock sun.” When the atmospheric conditions are just right, mock suns appear. You see them unexpectedly. When you are looking at the sun, you see one or two mock suns on either side of it. Your intuition draws you to look up into the sky because you do not feel the changes in the atmosphere alerting you to its appearing, but you are so into looking at the sky when you live on a boat, you can’t help but experience them periodically. (Barney)

Looking upward, women see the forces of their survival: wind to fill their vessels' sails with air, rain to make rainbows after the storm, stars to navigate by, and an occasional mock sun to inspire them. They feel the rhythm of Nature's ways, and, like children nestled in Her arms, they never want to leave their watery place.

Barney Calls: "Life is Always Half-Full"

My time with Barney is remembered as time spent with an optimistic being. She shares with me an example of how her optimism shapes her view of life.

My husband and I complement each other. He will see the catastrophe and the end of the world, and I will look at it and see the glass is half-full, and with this half-full glass you can still do this and this and this. It is like an emotional reaction to a situation. Then, we both step back and start looking at it realistically. We are good together. (Barney)

Barney and her mate complement each other and work in harmony. To *complement* means to "fill up or complete" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 145). Barney and her mate "fill" each other up and together make a "complete" sailing whole. To be harmonious, is to be in a place of "joining, agreement and accord" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 342). Harmonious relationships among the crew of a small boat are important for establishing an accord of intentions and a joining of actions, both required to ensure a smooth journey. Sailing the boat to new crossing-overs, they form one capable crew.

New meaning to the term "interdependence" applies when one considers the ways of successful sailing couples. Voyages are not accomplished without the coordinated help and support of the other. Though we need to have autonomy and a healthy sense of self to survive on this journey, Barney reminds us that we do not get far without the complementary support of others who fill us up and make us whole

beings. Though a woman's mid-life journey is undertaken alone, it is nice to have a pal along.

Pals come in all shapes and sizes in the sea world. With regard to the maintenance of her boat, Linda has come to know that she relies on others to "watch her back and take care of her." If something mechanical breaks, she inevitably calls one of the boatyard folk to "bail her out," and when one of the people suffer injury or need help, she is right there offering comfort and assistance. She gives an example:

Look at the relationship I have with Gloria and Colin. They have things I need and I have things they need. Right now Gloria is using my broom and my Wellies (boots) and... I need to borrow her husband, Colin, to fix my sink.
(Linda)

Linda's life is always in a state of being half-full and half-empty as she seeks out and gives back in the spirit of maritime bartering. *Barter* means "of uncertain origin" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 58). In the sea world, it is not clear when or where our sharing ways originated. Rather, what we have come to know is that it is irrelevant whose turn it is to give or receive. It is more important to realize that equilibrium in life can not be maintained without the other to fill a half-empty way of being.

Cindy echoes this knowing way with her experience of "what goes around comes around."

One day I was motoring down the Intra-coastal Waterway, and my engine became clogged and would not run. I met this all around boat guy in a marina. He sat down with me and showed me how to rebuild the engine. He did not charge me; instead, I painted some names on boats for him. Cruisers on the Waterway usually do not accept any kind of payment unless it is in trade. If you do not have anything to trade, they would say, "You help someone else someday." There were many times later that I helped someone else, whether it is on their boat or in another way. (Cindy)

“Perfect” strangers fill up the empty places in our lives, and like the tides of the sea, the incoming tide is followed by the outgoing flow. On land we learn to give before we receive; but as bartering sailors, who do not know the origin of the other’s sharing, we know that it is acceptable to receive before we give. This trust and good will builds a circle of friendship that goes around and around the sea world. Sailors know “The stranger does not come accidentally, he [sic] brings a particular gift and illumination” (O’Donohue, 1997, p. 18). We of the sea way have come to know the importance of being open so as to keep a sharp lookout for “perfect” strangers to fill our half-empty lives with gifts or by receiving our returned favors.

Linda Calls: “Simplify, Simplify, Simplify”

At the end of our conversations, Linda was concerned that we had not talked enough about the essence of this life, the reason that people seek it. “Barbara, you have to tell them this life is about simplify, simplify, simplify. You have got to simplify your life in order live this way.”

“Less is more” (Gallagher, 1993, p. 141) and, “small is beautiful” (p. 159); less and small are descriptions of a place embodied in the lived sea way. Linda’s space is one of “lessness” and “smallness.” Her space is small, yet, to her it is beautiful, in that, it is “handsome,” which means “good looking” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 340) or, at least, looking good to her. Linda describes her home, her small but beautiful place, this way:

When you construct a place and call it home, you put your stuff in it, but there is more to it than that. You have to make your bunk comfortable, have your *Teddygrahams*, and ice cold milk. You have to make it comfortable for your everyday existence. What I like to do is to watch TV. My favorite show comes

on at 11pm, so, I want to be in my bunk to watch it. That is why I chose that (points to the couch) as my bunk. My bunk was not comfortable, so I bought the egg crates to make it cozy...but the most important thing is that quilt, folded up on my bed. That pink quilt that I bought for five dollars in a flea market is important to me because it is soft and, it smells like me. It is one of the things I like, and I smell it and I say, that is my stuff, my boat, my smells. (Linda)

Linda's simple place is small and beautiful because it allows her to live a simplified life which reduces her stress.

Linda's entire body is of the seaway as demonstrated when she tied and untied a "bowline" knot with her toes. A bowline is a sailing knot that easily can be released from a rope that is under severe loads (Jarman, 1986). The strain on a rope serves as a metaphorical description of Linda's stressful land life.

I see all my friends who are separated and divorced trying to raise kids, repair the roof, get the toilet to flush, and figure out how to pay the taxes. The way past that place in life is to simplify, simplify, simplify. I had to ask myself, what was causing my stress? The stress was about the rent, cleaning, cutting the grass, and maintaining the house. It was about the house. So, I got rid of the house, and that is how I ended up here (on a boat). It is a simplified way of life. I knew I was stressed out because my stomach was in knots. I was sick, and I was in a real bad way because of the stress...The house and possessions did it to me, so, that is the way I did it. I reduced my possessions. Reduce just reduce. (Linda)

Linda was tied up in a bowline knot from living life under a "heavy load." She chose to break free of that way of being and followed a path to a familiar place, the sea. Linda untied the "bowline" with all the prowess of a salty lady, and with one pull on the rope, her load was released and the line eased. Linda has come to know that mid-life women's lives have taken on new directions. Our previous ways are no longer dependent on the "...rhythms of procreation and the dependencies that these created" (Bateson, 1990, p. 2). Our years of health have been extended, as have our

opportunities for diverse and meaningful careers, causing a need to redesign our lives and reconsider the basic concepts we use to construct a sense of self. "...Work. Home. Love. Commitment" (Bateson, 1990, p. 2). Linda reconstructed her self when she reconsidered her life as one of sailing work, boats as home, love of child, and commitment to her chosen life.

Simplicity means less complex. Gloria calls to us to remember that the simplicity of having less can lead to a new way of being. She hears Linda's call to *simplify*, which means, "making simpler" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 720).

I can just open a tin of fish, make rice and that is the meal. I have learned not to be wasteful. I have learned to think about the next destination and how much money I have to spend there. I think before I buy. I used to live in the shops. In the UK, I was shopping every weekend. Now, I have learned that there are so many 'necessities' in life that you can just do without. Now, I am focusing on the things that are really important to have rather than the things I think I should have. (Gloria)

Dee joins Gloria's call that less complex ways are part of being in this life. She calls to us to unload the technical trappings of the land, practice a more "primal way" of existence, and return to simple, natural ways of the sea. On her boat, Dee partakes in "primary living." She provides herself with only basic conveniences, such as hot water, heat, and refrigeration. She seeks to heal "push button" people from their excesses and technology dependent ways. For Dee and Gloria, the sea life is about experiencing less complex ways, but that is not everyone's truth.

Simplicity means more complex. Donna and her husband Cosmos have come to know that the acquisition of a simplified life is realized through complex ways of knowing. Donna suggests that we are not simple sailors living a simple life.

The life is not simple, and it takes a lot of intellectual work. When we navigate, we use more electronic instruments and have to figure them out in order to make them work. We have to get up to speed on hooking up and operating the Single Side Band radio. There is so much to learn; the manual for receiving just the weather on the radio is a couple inches thick. (Donna)

Once learned, however, complex instruments and radio communication skills ease the acts of sailing a boat. Complex knowing can simplify the cruising life. Perhaps, the complex knowing ways of the sea allow one to hear Linda's call to "simplify, simplify, simplify." After all, what constitutes the meaning of simplification depends on each person's perception and unique view of reality. Simplified living may not always be achieved by seeking the simplest ways.

Simple living is not easy. Donna reminds us that simple does not mean easy; this simple sailing life can also be a hard life. Physical, as well as intellectual, capital is expended to make the cruising life a time of smooth sailing. She reflects on how hard she and her husband have worked on improving the boat during his retirement years. "We are retired now and we do not have to go back to work, yet Cosmos and I have never worked harder than we do now." They have been working on their boat from eight to five every day for the last three months, reinstalling the boat's diesel engine and installing a complex hydraulic lifting system to hoist both sails and heavy deck equipment. The boat is a mechanical wonder of engineering creativity. Achieved through hard physical and mental labor, Cosmos's simple smile reflects the joy and pride taken in the creation of this complex piece of sailing handy work, their boat.

What is the meaning of Linda's call to "simplify, simplify, simplify?" The muses know that to get to simplicity, they must first pass through and sort out the

complexity of their lives. Linda's call is to look at our lives and sort out the stress and clutter. Dee and Gloria suggest we consider unloading the burdens of the technical that tether us to the land. Donna reminds us that the hard work of developing and understanding complexity ultimately eases our voyage.

The Buddha's way to enlightenment is the attainment of a quiet mind realized after years of discipline and focused efforts. Is the achievement of a simplified life a quiet mind? A simplified life, the essence of Linda's call, is achieved by incorporating simplicity into our way of being. *Simplicity* means "singleness of nature and unity" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 720). Sailing women have to come to know that a simplified life realized through focused thought, and embodied in complex ways of knowing, eases their journey to Avalon.

Gloria Calls: "Sailing is Freedom"

Knowing Gloria's sailing ways is to name her way of being in the world. When describing the experiences of sailing, she names feelings of "joy," "release," and "total freedom." Gloria speaks about knowing freedom as only a Black woman from a post-apartheid country is able.

In South Africa, I could not sit on a bench with a white person when I was young. The seats were for Whites only. Freedom has no limit when I am sailing. One minute I am in one country and the next minute I am in another country. I get up in the morning, and I am not answerable to anyone but myself, that is the kind of freedom I mean. When I go to another country, I am not classified as a Black woman; I am just classified as a human being, a sailor. (Gloria)

Freedom means to make "free, woo, or court" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 299). Colin was able to woo and court Gloria with his way of being in the world. He wooed her,

married her, and showed her a way to experience freedom, a way of living that he knew only too well. He showed her freedom's way at sea, and she "was ready to go."

Gina shares Gloria's experience of sailing as being a way to know "total freedom." To Gina, sailing means "stopping when you want and going where you want." It means wandering the planet without constraint to go to a destination called "here," spending time with the people called "we." In the land of "here," responsibilities of the past are gone; there is no one to whom one must answer. Gloria shares a secret thought: "All of my life I have been taking care of and nursing other people. I felt I had given enough in my lifetime on the land. It was my time now." At mid-life she began thinking about how old she was and how much time she had left to enjoy life. "People say life begins at 40; I am 46 now, and I was getting out of there."

"*They are there; they are not fully human, and they live in that place*" (Tuan, 1977, p. 50). Members of the "we" group live in the "here" place. "We" of "here" are close to each other, and distant from members of the outside (*they*) group (Tuan, 1977). Gloria has found a place of freedom at sea, "here," to reconsider her human relationships, prioritize her pursuits, and put her life above others, *they*. She is journeying to Avalon, and the lessons learned along the way satisfy her desire of leaving "them" behind and "getting out of *there*." Gloria's journey to Avalon is now a sea voyage.

Gina's lived experience at sea reveals feelings of freedom realized by being able to do "what ever," "when ever," and "where ever." She describes it as a place "where you can see 30 feet to the bottom." Only when time is chosen carefully can

the freedom to journey “where ever” to do “what ever” be realized. Gina and I joined voices to sing a song about how the meaning of freedom is coiled around our experience of mid-life time.

“Freedom is Time Reconsidered”

Time reconsidered becomes a door to a place.
It provides an opening from one life to another;
it allows travel to a desired way.

We wait for the “right” time just like we wait for the
right bus,
right tide,
right weather window.

The door is opened at our chosen life phase.
When the money goals and responsibilities of the land are met,
we enter the place of freedom, mid-life.

In this place, we see “30 feet to the bottom.”
When the time is right for each,
we jump in and float away. (Schaefer, 2003)

Lyrics of the song, *Me and Bobby Mc Gee*, say “Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose.” Perhaps our concept of time and place is the last thing we lose before we realize freedom. Loss of the traditional concepts of time and place put Gloria and Gina well on their way to realizing the meaning of freedom. Their clocks read “when ever” time and they follow a sea chart to a “where ever” place. When voyaging, one rethinks time and place in order to realize freedom. Perhaps that is why I no longer wear a watch and call the vastness of the sea my home.

Dee Calls: “Be Responsible for Thyself”

Menemsha II is Dee’s boat, and, as with most used cruising boats, it is a work in progress. Like Linda, Dee is living on a “dead boat” but, unlike Linda, she is

attempting to restore it to make it fit again for sailing. She has subcontracted the difficult engine work, but because she wants to prepare herself for sea by “knowing the boat,” she has chosen to install all the plumbing fixtures, water heaters, and navigation aids herself.

Those who choose to go to sea need to accept the risks and challenges. They must be fairly self-sufficient and have the ability to learn and figure out problems with the boat. They have to learn to take responsibility for their own well being. (Dee)

De means “undoing or doing the opposite of an underlying verb” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 186). Dee epitomizes the “undoing” of a few choice verbs that capture her responsible day to day way of being. Verbs like neglect, abandon, ignore take on new meaning when prefaced with *de*. Her methodical, studied, and careful approach to this lived way has shaped her into a prepared ocean sailor that “de” neglects, “de” abandons, and “de” ignores her responsibilities to self and boat. In other words, she has prepared herself and takes responsibility for undertaking a sea voyage.

Dee sings, “When you are out in Mother Ocean, you better be prepared and know thyself, because there is no where to run and there is no where to hide.” To insure her self knowledge is sound and ready for the sea world, Dee reads sailing journals, attends sailing seminars and talks endlessly with the sailing craftsmen who work in her marina. She prides herself in “constantly learning” and using the information she gains to improve her sailing skills. Dee has come to know that in dealing with the uncertainties of the sea over and over again sailors come face to face with their inner core, their very being. She calls out a need for knowing yourself so well that one can readily name what they do not know. There is wisdom in knowing

one's knowledge gap. It provides a map for what is yet to be learned. "Covering up the knowledge void with putty only exposes the weakness and sinks the boat." To be self-reliant and ready for sea requires preparation. Her song of being responsible for self and being prepared lingers in my ears. I hear it in Barney's call, too.

Being on the boat makes me aware of securing things and having a place for them. It is nice to put it back to where it belongs so it is secure when you are under way and it is there if you want to use it...In the sea life, you can get into the habit of stowing, it makes it easier to be prepared in case a situation comes up. (Barney)

In the sea world, self-responsibility is an act of self-care. Preparing to go on a voyage, a cruiser must take time to secure items below, an activity called "stowing." To stow means, to "put away or to store" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 765). The ritual of stowing the boat helps protect the muse inside the vessel. It is an act of self-care. Barney stows her boat to keep items from getting lost or dislodged while under way.

I do not tire of it. It gives me a comfort being well prepared, it is like, "I have done all I can and what ever happens" – it is not a pressure thing; it gives me a good feeling...It gives me pride and a sense of accomplishment that we can do this. (Barney)

These calls of self-responsibility, preparedness, and self-care, are consistent with the mid-life tasks that challenge women on their journey to Avalon.

To know if they are prepared, during times of transition, mid-life women listen to their physical vessels. They need to hear their hearts beat, pound, and race in response to life's challenges for they know they are responsible for themselves and their journey. All the activities and skills learned during their life are considered, as they take stock of what they have stowed on board. It gives them a good feeling knowing what stores are missing. They are honest with themselves as they actively

determine if they know how to use their equipment properly, have a back-up plan for reaching their destination, and know what it is that they do not yet know. Mid-life is the time of life when all the things overlooked now need looking into. As they prepare their ships to cross oceans, this is the time when they consider all their weaknesses and all their endless possibilities. As my muses call, “There is no where to run and there is no where to hide, and it feels good coming to know what you have yet to discover.”

Cindy Calls: “Life is Layers”

Life is applied to the full-size stretches of canvas upon which Cindy, as artist, places layers of oil paint. Oil paints are used instead of water color because “oil paint is more conducive to layering than water colors, which only shows one layer of paint soaked into the paper.” Water colors soak into the paper and as an art medium can not capture the multiple layers of the lived. Is water alone enough to reveal the lived ways of sea women?

Cindy has found that her lived life of ice skating, jogging, and art can not be sustained with water alone; it can not support her many layers of being. That is why Cindy’s sea life includes many land activities, constructing a multi-faceted being. “Water colored” life can not capture the richness and whole of our being. Beings require the use of other pigments so new layers can be applied to a life. Cindy has helped me come to know that sailing women are multilayered beings.

To come to know Cindy’s lived experience as a sailor, one must first consider her lived way as an artist. She likes to “paint big,” a way of being that reflects how

she lives her life. She uses an abstract approach to her subject matter of the last 20 years, which is, images of disassembled marine diesel engines. The shapes, shadows, colors, and textures of disassembled engine parts dominate the walls of her studio, giving a sense of habitation to the once empty space.

The images of the diesel-part pile are lines and planes. It has opened my eyes to a whole new way of seeing. I apply that way to view the rest of the world. When I go to the grocery store, they are all there; the grapes and carrots are my circles and sticks. (Cindy)

Knowing there was a life-time of paint below her 42 year old surface, I considered Cindy's top layer. Her composition is made of many shapes: sailor, ice skater, jogger, and artist. Each shape on the canvas seems connected to the others. Each shape, unique among the many, is part of the whole work of art. The layers of paint applied to each shape reveal the depth and character of her multi-faceted being.

Rendering meaning to her phenomenological view of each shape, her way of applying paint on the canvas keeps the view beneath each layer open. She cautions that we never want to lose sight of what is on the "beneath" layer, for there is the essence of the shape's being. "Our perception senses how near is the canvas underneath the picture" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1958, p. 29). Cindy the artist,

...suddenly tears the person experiencing it out of the context of his life, and yet relates him back to the whole of his existence. In the experience of art is present a fullness of meaning that belongs not only to this particular content or object but rather stands for the meaningful whole of life. (Gadamer, 1975/2000, p. 70)

Cindy instinctively has come to know that each experience overlays the previous one, and accumulating layers compose a life.

Are mid-life women who choose to live on boats applying a top layer of paint to their ongoing life portrait? What is revealed when we peel back the top layers of each “circle and stick” and consider the meaning of the layers below? Lives considered in a context of a composition (Bateson, 1990) reveal layers of meaning.

Donna helps expose the meaning of past layers as she reflects on going back to lived places. She remembers that going back to places like the Caribbean enabled her to see “a little more about them and resume unfinished business there.” Going back to places sometimes disappoints because they are not as you remember them being. The sea ports may have become more commercially developed and lost their charm. Whereas, to go back to familiar places enables one to experience a feeling “like home.” Perhaps, for wandering beings, returning to a familiar place recreates it as their place of home in the world. Previous places also provide easier and faster routes to a place of home. Going back a second time makes the journey’s experiences less surprising and “makes you more confident.”

Crossing the Atlantic the second time, I was less anxious than the first time...I did not worry the second time out. It is a more trade wind trip (down wind). It was boisterous as the boat moved a lot more, but it was not scary. I had more confidence. (Donna)

Donna’s life layers are stored memories used as she journeys through life. She has come to know that past experiences continue to reveal what she has yet to learn, what disappoints, the importance of home places, and ways to bolster self-confidence. The meaning found in past layers, supports us on our journey. Looking back from the boat gives sailing women an informed new view.

Gloria, too, has lived a life of layers during times when she was not of the sea way. Raised in Africa, she knew the discrimination of being a Black Woman in a White world. “I could not even sit on a bench with a White woman during Apartheid. Leaving that oppression to work as a nurse in the United Kingdom provided her with another layer of being as she administered care to people thousands of miles from her home. Sailing is her most current layer, and Gloria admits she was an unlikely sailor: “I think I was the first Zimbabwean girl to do this. Sailing is not what Africans do.” Gloria is a complex being with many layers of lived ways that appear unrelated. Looking below the top layer of sailor we see colors of the nurse, and below that, we see a Black child in Africa. I have come to know how her past colorings create the hues of her current existence.

Cindy, Donna, and Gloria have helped me come to know that we are ongoing works of art with many layers. To appreciate the top-most layer of the composition, we consider the earlier applications of color. As the paint builds and the journey continues, we learn lessons, acquire depth, and evolve as beings in the world.

Donna Calls: “Friendships are Understood at Sea”

Donna’s offerings of coffee and cake always got our conversations off to a good start. She offered her food like her friendship. The possibilities of a relationship with her as friend reached out to me in a warm and comforting way. Is a “relationship” a type of vessel that *relates*, forming a “connection” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 649) with another? Is it what forms when crew remembers others left behind as *beings far*, or as they connect with people in the immediate vicinity as *beings near*?

Beings far. Familiar, long-term friends who live far away are like sailing vessels. If they are going to “be there for you,” they require attention and nurturing.

Donna recalls:

...if you are not part of their (land friends’) immediate life, it is like you are gone and they forget about you... I think some of these friends think that they have been abandoned because we have done it (left to go cruising), and they are hurt. My old friends can’t just drop in any more. It is going to take a little more effort and work to keep their friendships.

A real friendship is different than a passing acquaintance (O’Donohue, 1997).

“A real friendship is a deeper and more sacred connection...A friend is a loved one who awakens your life in order to free the wild possibilities within you” (O’Donohue, 1997, p. 19). When another causes us to feel that way, we have discovered a precious gift, a friend. Only if treated like a precious treasure, forever valued in our thoughts, will the friendship withstand the test of time. Not letting the other get lost in our past requires acts of participation in their lived experience; it requires a willingness to reach back when their voices call to you.

Sharing the experiences of our life with a friend is not an accidental act; it is a choice. Jane Stebbins (1999) recalls “I was writing letters and thinking how few people write back, and how sad it is that friendships fade away” (Stebbins, 1999, p. 10). Cruising reminds us of the care and effort that goes into keeping relationships with others. We continually look behind to keep them in our lives and memories (Bateson, 1994). Not to participate in another’s life in an act of friendship is a conscious decision, and this act of “indifference” (van Manen, 1990, p. 108) may result in feelings of abandonment by both parties. Others give us “...a sense of

purpose in our life, meaningfulness, grounds for living..." (van Manen, 1990, p. 108) thus, to turn our backs on another is to abandon ourselves. As we meet with others in meaningful ways we learn the ways to transcend ourselves.

Linda has come to know that long-term friendships are precious. She says it "hurts" to be away from them.

You value your old friends more as you get older because you realize that you are never going to be able to get another one...It is the friends that I had as a kid, who know everything about me, that I value more the older I get. (Linda)

Donna remembers how the cruising life has affected her relationships with her female friends left behind on the land:

On land, my friends would always be there. I had a little more female companionship, too. When I am cruising, I miss that (female companionship). You make friends while cruising, but cruising couples come as a package. You may meet a woman because she is married to the man your husband has recently befriended. You may not have anything in common with her, but you have to be her friend. It is difficult to find and have female friends that you want to spend time with out here...the 'girl thing' is nice to have.

The "girl thing" has to do with relating to another woman with whom you choose to spend time. As women in mid-life undertake their voyage, they seek muses whose calls enrich and guide their journey. Donna and Linda remind me that women seek kindred spirits who offer companionship, knowledge, and knowing ways. Donna shares a sad song about past relationships with land friends. She recalls:

To tell you the truth, no one really talks to us about what we are doing when we go back to land...We have traveled around the world, and when we come back, all people ask us is if we had a "nice time." You wait for them to ask you a little bit more, and they do not. They don't want to hear about these places. They will never go there, and they are not interested in what you have done. So basically, they do not talk about it. They do not talk about our cruising life; they are not interested.

If there is no one to share important moments, cruising can be a lonely experience for women. Mid-life is a time when we rediscover and enjoy the company of other women. “Friends sustain us” (Grambs, 1989, p. 93) through life. Though friendships vary with their level of love, openness, trust, sharing and length of commitment, we can not live a life without them. The need for friends is critical during a woman’s mid-life years.

What is the purpose of these adventures, if not to share the experience with a friend? Donna’s personal disappointment reveals meaning as we consider the near and far beings in our lives. *Beings far* are a distance away from us. Though they are near to our hearts, they are far from our voice. When you do not have your life-long friends near, who do you seek for consultation and support? Do sailors learn to value another kind of “friend” ship? Do they seek *beings near*?

Beings near. In the sea world, beings who are near by and exist in close proximity are members of the cruising community. Though the nearest bodily being to us is our self (Heidegger, (1953/1996), and our “everydayness is the nearest kind of being of the Da-sein” (p. 62), we come to know the cruising community as our closest beings beyond the self who share in the everydayness of this life. Though they may be strangers, they hear our call, and like a passing “relation” ship, they call back. *Beings near* are quickly made, transient friends who cross our path for a short time and are physically near us for only as long as their anchor is down. We never know when *beings near* will weigh anchor and sail off into the sunset.

Donna considers the quickly realized transient friendships of beings near:

There is less of the division by gender... Cruising friends are of different ages, different nationalities, different walks of life, and different economics. More vitality occurs in some of the discussions as a result. Relationships occur because of a common ground which makes it more interesting, in that, you are not all out of the same mold.

Relationships with *beings near* have vitality and commonality. They share our adjoining spaces and our everyday ways; they are in our present way of being. They are transient, but not temporary. Transient means “passing over...crossing over” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 827). Temporary means “lasting a short time” (p. 801). With transient beings, we share an “innerworldly” way at hand, a space that does not disappear in time. Space shared with *beings near* is not just pure dimension, because to be near to another also implies a “spatiality of innerworldly things at hand” (Heidegger, (1953/1996, p. 104). We quickly become connected to *beings near* as important others in our transient community.

Barney has come to know that *beings near* are “connected with” very quickly, yet they become a friend for they awaken what O’Donohue (1997) calls the “wild possibilities within you” (p. 19). As the result of their continual sharing of new experiences, she feels she is able to relate to them strongly, and “It does not matter who they are.” Barney also appreciates and prefers a “face to face” friend even if it is for only a short time. Coming face to face with the Other brings us to a place of self reflection, and in this state of “...calling into question one’s self ...in the face of the other...” (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 81), we are brought to being itself (Levinas, 1961/1969). “The face to face remains an ultimate situation” (Levinas, p. 81).

Relationships built on the “common ground” of the sea, reveal how commonality, shared experiences, and “face time” create a powerful bond in relationships. “Friends guide and learn from each other, especially in unexplored terrain” (Bateson, 1990, p. 103). “They learned the value of shared experiences and the benefits of solidarity, by becoming friends” (p. 113). Though not always a replacement for the familiarity of long term relationships, the cruising community is still able to hear the call of the muse and satisfy her need to share and acquire knowledge and knowing ways. “The stranger does not come accidentally; he [sic] brings a particular gift and illumination” (O’Donohue, 1997, p.18).

The changes to being, caused by the lived experiences of the voyage, are not visible. Carried back to the interested others who populate your former life, they are hidden in your core. Past others observe your current lived state. Since they have not been witness to your transformation at sea, they do not need detailed accounts of what you have come to know. They have difficulty relating to your sea voyage, for they are on voyages of a different nature. You learn to save your detailed accountings for fellow cruisers and sea voyagers who seek you out as muse. You learn that the friends of your former life hunger only for your presence and are satisfied just to have you near.

Mid-life women seek interested other “mid-lifers to share the experiences of their unique lived journey.” Because sharing experiences supports other women in transition, women at sea have come to know that voyages can not be completed without this exchange. Fellow cruisers are critical to the success of a woman’s

journey, especially when there is uncertainty, and there is abundant uncertainty during mid-life (Mercer & Doyle, 1989).

Cruisers are communal beings, and their calls carry their invitation to congregate and share the lived experiences of the sea. The cruising life fosters intense friendships among beings “on the move” whose voices carry on the water to the waiting ears of others. Identified only by their designated hailing ports found on the boat’s hull, cruisers are known by their historical origins, their place of memory from where their calls originated.

Gina Calls: “We are Modern Cruisers”

Gina is a “modern cruiser.” She reveals the meaning of her “modern” cruising way to me in conversation. To be a “modern cruiser,” one values the traditional freedoms of the sea world, but also seeks the freedom financial security provides. She says, “The freedom realized at sea started back in the pirate days, when the sea life was the only way to live. Back then, what were the pirates after? They wanted gold and money.” As a modern cruiser, Gina refuses to be without financial means because it provides her with a sense of security to buy what her family needs and what the boat requires to sail. This level of preparation enables her vessel to realize the meaning of this way of life, freedom.

Security means a condition of “being without care or apprehension, to be safe and out of danger” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 698). To *sense* security means to have a “perception” (p. 702) of being safe and without care. Gina perceives security at sea to be realized partially through obtaining adequate financial resources required in this

uncertain world. Enough money is needed to buy health insurance, boat insurance, and her children's education. She considers financial resources not as wealth for herself, but, rather, as a form of self-responsibility and preparedness. As Dee's song goes, to be secure is to be responsible for your self and prepared enough to react to the events of an uncertain environment. Barney concurs with Dee, in that, security earned by being prepared is not necessarily a monetary thing; it is a confident way of being--arrived at from knowing ways. As a sailor Gina agrees with the notion of sailing preparedness, but as a "modern cruiser" she furthers this notion by insuring her "cruising kitty" is well fed prior to departure.

Linda echoes Gina's call and promotes the idea of portable wealth.

If you want to give me something as a gift, I want gold. It can get you out of trouble any place in the world...Gold is a weight and if it is coming to me I want 14 or 18 Karat. Also, it has to be small so I can keep it locked in a box on the boat so I can travel with it. (Linda)

Sal, Anne, Dee and Barney are employed actively while living the cruising life in order to feed a depleted "cruising kitty." Though not extravagant in their needs, each cruising woman has a list of "must haves" in order to live this way. Financial funds are needed to purchase boat equipment, fuel, food, insurance, and travel to visit family.

Like the maiden traveling to Avalon (Bolen, 1994), the muses have come to know that security at sea is obtained by being financially prepared. Financial security on the journey enables them to first, "look ahead, sort out, and make sense of future tasks" (assess their financial needs); second, "gain power and self-sufficiency" (money or gold); and third, "act decisively on their own behalf" (accumulate needed

resources). Gina's lived experiences have shaped her into a "modern" mid-life cruiser who understands the importance of securing her vessel for what lies ahead.

Having money and using other securing strategies such as anchors, sea drogues, chain, and rope does not guarantee security at sea. Wind, waves, and unforeseen events can break an anchor's hold, and cause the vessel to go adrift. Perhaps, as Dee suggests, the only dependable security lies with the sailor's preparedness to manage the vessel in life's insecure seas. Maybe the only dependable security line is the one that comes from the prepared inner sailor. Gina and Linda, however, have come to know that a little money is also helpful.

No one entity secures us in life, as the lived journey exposes women to a variety of challenges. Whether the resources are financial or intellectual, it is important that she have enough of both in order to keep the vessel moving, the necessary way of being in order to realize freedom.

At some point in the life of a woman, a call is heard that transforms her mid-life time into a temporal place of pause. It is a time when she may consider another path "there." A woman may choose to climb a mountain, adopt a child, run for political office, return to work, or sail a boat. As shown in the lives of each sailing muse, the call to sea may come at different times. Mine, Linda, Cindy, and Dee's call came before mid-life. For us, the call was generated by enthusiastic sea-going parents, heard by receptive children while playing in a boat yard environment. Barney and Gina heard the call as young women while participating in competitive sailing

sports. Gloria heard it at mid-life when her biological alarm clock went off, announcing it was “time for me.”

Time applies layers to our lived life. Cindy’s knowing way reveals each woman as a painting with many layers of life choices collected over time. My sailing women embody a composition revealing their chosen ways of answering the call to get them “there.” As sailors they know how to journey to geographical “theres,” and they also know the way to the ineffable place of “there” whose naming is beyond language and is revealed only through experiences told. For called mid-life voyagers, the quest for the ineffable “there” is a quest for Avalon.

The Call Moves Us to a Quest

Sailing muses are creatures cut from a different cloth, one that is made of sailing canvas whose stiff weave forms beings with knowing ways needed to undertake sea journeys successfully.

Resolve and discipline, determination and obstinate endurance of will, a confident sense of humor, the refusal to give in to despair, the resilience to adapt to changing circumstances, the spiritual strength to persevere and prevail come what may—these are priceless commodities when the wind rises to Force 10 (a storm wind blowing at sea over 48 miles per hour). Unfortunately, these cannot be packaged and bought over the counter. They have to be acquired. (Shane, 1993, p. 1.4)

Shane’s voice echoes a description of the same mid-life behavior found in women’s literature and embodied by my muses. Bolen (1994) describes the metaphorical journey of a woman on a quest to Avalon, the mythical journey that epitomizes a woman’s mid-life transitional aspiration. To get to Avalon a woman must possess the knowledge learned through the successful accomplishment of four tasks. My sailing

women share lived experiences that reveal the knowledge of the sea and of mid-life living. The similarities between Shane's sailors, Bolen's mid-life women, and my sailing muses reveal the sailing dimensions of women's transcendent life at sea.

First, women must learn to look ahead, sort out, and make sense of future tasks. Thinking about the future, prepares women mentally for what may occur (Bolen, 1994). Shane (1993) echoes the qualities learned from the first task when he describes a sailor as one who possesses "...determination and obstinate endurance of will..." (p. 1.4). That description sounds like the "modern cruiser," Gina, or the self-reliant sailors, Dee and Barney, who all know the value of looking ahead and being prepared.

Second, on the way to Avalon, the women gain power without losing a sense of self. They become self-sufficient (Bolen, 1994). Shane agrees and describes the sailor who has completed the second task as one who shows "...a confident sense of humor ..." (Shane, 1993, p. 1.4). Gloria, the sailing novice, came to know that sailing confidence breeds self-confidence; "Understanding what I was doing on the boat" creates a sense of self-confidence enough so she is able to "stand my own watch, while Colin slept."

Third, the women live long enough to see patterns in their life and, having seen them, act decisively on their own behalf (Bolen, 1994). "Resolve... obstinate endurance of will...the refusal to give in to despair..." are Shane's words describing a sailor who has completed the third task (p. 1.4). Cindy's artistic ways of knowing reveal patterning within layers of lived ways, and her endurance as an athletic skater,

wind surfer, and jogger demonstrate the resolve and focus of women who, in spite of their diverse beings, continue the voyage.

Fourth, women stop rescuing others and focus on their own needs (Bolen, 1994). Shane describes the attributes needed to enable sailors to stay focused on themselves, "...resilience to adapt to changing circumstances... spiritual strength to persevere and prevail come what may ..." (p. 1.4). This is a description of all of the muses who have chosen the sea way. Their stories of adaptation and spiritual strength are captured in Sal's sea story.

We were doing a Thanksgiving cruise. I call it my storm sail of 1990. We had been on the boat just over a year and did not pay much attention to the weather forecasts... Because I wanted to be somewhere secure from the weather that was coming in, we left Port Madison, which is right across the sound, and headed into Kingston. We left in the afternoon and noticed an ocean-going tug with three anchors put out. I thought to myself "we are missing something."

When we got out of the lee of the shore, the strength of the wind caused the boat to accelerate to 15 knots. We surfed all the way to Kingston. Later we learned that the wind had gusted to 70 knot winds (hurricane force). We were not damaged. Some companion boats suffered minor damage. We had no one hurt....At that point, I stood on the bow of the boat and said, 'Thank you for bringing us home. (Sal)

Shane voices the qualities of true sailors, qualities that are echoed in Bolen's work describing the way to Avalon and transcendence, and qualities that describe the muses in my study. This link between worlds reveals the journey to Avalon as being a sea voyage currently being undertaken by women sailors at mid-life.

I can no longer think without being in motion, and I am no longer satisfied traveling between familiar places. The back and forth of daily dead ends stifle my being. At mid-life I am called to new destinations that are different and new. I require

that the road behind me fade into memory because at mid-life there is no going back. The journey lies before me, and it leads to another place, and that place is followed by another place, and so it goes, on and on. An occasional returning to familiar places occurs; we know that because the muses and Bateson's (1990) research has demonstrated our need for curious lookings back. I am a woman on a quest, and at this time of my intuitive availability, mid-life, I hearken to the calls of the muses.

 Their calls lead me on a quest for things missing from my life and culture (Bolen, 1994). The muses, whose vessels hold stores of vast wisdom, call to me, and through the voicing of their souls, I come to know the meaning of the journey; I come to know the purpose of my very being. The next chapter addresses the way we sail our lives "in search of Avalon."

CHAPTER FIVE:

SAILING OUR LIVES: THE WAY TO AVALON

The meaning of the voyage lies buried in the experience of the sailor's preparation. The message lies between the story lines sung by the muses whose vessels hold vast stores of wisdom. Their callings describe voyages to places of crossing over in route to the ineffable Avalon, an otherworld place "visible only under special conditions and to particular people" (Bolen, 1994, p. 126). Bradley's (1982) text, Mists of Avalon, introduces us to the mythology of Avalon, an island located in the town of Glastonbury, England. Usually shrouded in mist and fog, the enchanted island is accessible only to travelers whose calls reach a waiting barge, a vessel that transports beings to Avalon's shores. Women whose calls bring the vessel forth begin a journey that leaves their current world behind.

Journeys storied in sailors' tales bring listeners to know the affects of visiting this magical place. The "...symbols and events have a certain mystery and power for us that in turn evokes our own memories and thoughts. We can be struck by the story's message or have a flash of insight that illuminates something we have not seen before" (Bolen, 1994, p. 127). We have already come to know that sailors' unique expressions of being in the "otherworld," the sea, can have that affect. Their sonorous musings are expressed in the language of the "way to" spoken in a dialect of memories. Taking authentic listeners on a circular journey to meaning, sailing muses are our soul's voice of remembered lived place, lived time, and lived human

relationships (van Manen, 1990). “Way to” themes continue to unfold with each story as we journey together to meaning, to purpose, and to becoming.

Calling the muses brings forth their stores of endless stories. Their messages move us across the “in-between” place of water and mist; the more we listen with authentic hearing the closer we get to Avalon’s shores. Translated from Celtic, *Isle of Avalon* means “Isle of Glass” (Bolen, 1994, p. 126). The word, *glass*, was originally used to name a drinking vessel, a “drinking glass” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 319). This utilitarian reconsideration of the place called Avalon reminds me of Barney’s view of life, a glass that is half-full. Having become only half-full ourselves from hearing only a portion of the muse’s lived life at sea, perhaps, we too have the capacity to fill some more. Thus, we continue our journey of “filling up” and reflect on the muse’s “way to” themes that bring us to a deeper way of knowing place, time, Others, and circular existence on their mid-life journeys at sea.

The Place of “In-between”

“In-between” is a place amid here and there, near and far, or up and down. It is the pause between the words and the question mark, the water between the ship and the shore, or the trough that separates the crests of waves. “In-between” is a place measured by *dead reckoning*. “Dead reckoning is the primary representation of the boat’s path...to which you will apply corrections and adjustments from other sources of information” (E. Maloney, 1989, p. 19). This technique of maritime navigation ensures vessels will arrive safely to their destinations. As we establish our path across the place of “in-between” by dead reckoning, we consider the meaning we have come

to know and the adjustments made in our life. The “in-between” experiences of life become a place of reconsideration, readjustments, and growth.

To be “in-between” is to be in exploratory motion between places of being.

There we come to know that the place we start is often the place we rediscover anew.

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time. (Eliot, 1943, p. 59)

This awakening ultimately affects our self-identity with our overall sense of space and time (Casey, 1993). “In-between,” where the journey unfolds, “...not only takes us to places but embroils us in them. For this reason they cannot be reduced to superficial visitations or ‘day trips,’ in which we careen or cruise between places considered as arbitrary stopping points” (Casey, 1993, p. 276). The places visited on the journey take the sailor from “...threshold to threshold into ever different experiences. In each new experience, another dimension of the soul unfolds” (O’Donohue, 1997, p. 127).

The totality of the whole being, *Dasein*, consists of our starting place at birth, our present everyday place, and our ending place of death (Heidegger, 1953/1996). Each step away from the starting place is a new beginning, and each new beginning leads to the ultimate end. We bring forward our past into the embroilment of the “in-between,” and our path of dead reckoning stretches out before us beyond the mists of Avalon. “The ‘between’ of birth and death (beginning and end) already lies in the being of *Da-sein*... *Da-sein* is the Between” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 343).

Voyaging at sea reveals a mid-life woman's journey on the mist of the watery "in-between." Linda brings us to this way of knowing as she shares the distinction between her two careers, delivery captain and sailing teacher.

Delivering boats is different from sailing boats. When I deliver a boat, it is about getting from point 'A' to point 'B.' When I teach sailing, it is about the journey... I teach people the way to enjoy traveling on a boat. When I teach sailing, it is the journey that I focus on not the destination, and that is the joy of sailing. (Linda)

Linda helps others come to know it is the journey, not the "going to place," that is the purpose of the sailing voyage. Linda's way of knowing distinguishes between the places of destination, and the "in-between" place of the journey. A journey is "a passage through life" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 407); it can start at any place and go to no particular place. It is a place of being "in-between." To teach the skills of voyaging is to teach a way of knowing. Linda teaches the joy of being in the "in-between" place--water.

Water: The "In-between" Place on the Way

Barney reflects on her way of being in-between: "We have Rochester, New York as the hailing port on our boat transom, but our mailing address is Florida, and my boat is currently in Annapolis." Donna states her hailing port is Canada, the place she is "coming from" in route to the Bahamas, her "going to" destination. Gloria's home is Africa but her "hailing port" is Australia, the place of destination for this voyage. Gina is from Annapolis, but she recently lived on her boat in Key West, Florida. She has returned to Annapolis to live for a year and then will be "heading south."

At sea, sailors are in-placed in a moving boat, between places of past and future destinations, in the “in-between” place called water. “Hailing ports” name their past “coming from” places, and charts name their future “going to” places. The here and now place of a vessel underway names their present state of being, “in-between.” Mid-life sailing women at sea live in the here and now place of “in-betweens.” Each of them has come to know a different “coming from” and “going to” place, but they all share one place in common, and that is the place of the “in-between”--water. It is in this aqueous space the way to Avalon unfolds.

The place of looking back. Being “in-between” places prompts Donna to look back and reflect on ports previously visited on earlier cruising voyages. The view from Donna’s boat, her place of voyaging for seven years, reminds her of familiar “coming from” and “going to” places. Her reflective expressions from the place of “in-between” open our way to the meaning of looking back. Ever glancing backward views fortify and inform us about the journey ahead. “Looking back” to prior cruising grounds “is like returning home.”

Crossing the Atlantic the second time was less anxious...I had prepared only a few meals in advance because I had more confidence in my ability to prepare a meal at sea. Going back a second time, I felt I could deal with the officials in Europe a little bit better. (Donna)

“Discovering the connection and regularities within knowledge you already have, is another kind of homecoming, a recognition that feels like a glorious game or a profound validation” (Bateson, 1994, p. 205). For Donna, the activity of looking back was like coming home, and she felt more at ease with her voyage. To look back

or re-experience lived life gives way to feelings of confidence, an important step taken by mid-life women on the way to Avalon.

Like mid-life, water is an in-between place, and when reflected upon reveals the “looking back” embodiment of the self on a life journey. The “looking back” places of mid-life open us up to our bodiless selves, our souls. When we reflect upon our lived life, what looks back is an image that looks like us, but it is not of us. It is a past form of being, one less confident than the evolving self. Mid-life can be a joyful journey as women learn new ways of being on the “in-between” waterways leading to Avalon.

To balance on water. Cindy describes ice skating as a practiced ritual of repetition on the “in-between” place of frozen water. Skating is an over and over again way of being that leaves a physical imprint called muscle memory. Repetition is a way into the body’s unconscious way of remembering. Our body sees without eyes and remembers a way of being. Repeating the physical ways of the “in-between” place opens invisibility to meaning, and it is the invisible that “renders the visible” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 151). It is the remembered voyage that renders the journey.

Considering the painted shape of “ice skater” in Cindy’s composition of life is necessary because it is part of her embodied being. We can not come to know Cindy as a sailor without also knowing her as a skater. Skating is her way of balancing on the “in-between” place of water. Ice skating maintains an equilibrium with Cindy’s lived life at sea. Keeping the fulcrum of lived ways from tipping to far to one side, ice

skating keeps her from “the plunge” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 167). She has come to know that to balance on the skate’s edge requires her shoulders, knees and ankles to be “all lined up,” because, just like a sail boat that is heeled over, alignment keeps the vessel from toppling. It keeps her from plunging into meaningless day-to-day being by enabling her to enter the place of “in- between.” To balance on mid-life’s edge, sea women have come to know the way to aligned being. *Align* means to “copulate” (Barnhart, 1995, p.18) as in “an act of coupling” (p. 161). To couple our being is to consider how each shape unites with the other to balance our lived composition. Mid-life women come to know that balancing their various ways of being in the world is required to keep their vessel upright and insure smooth sailing on the way to Avalon.

Cindy recalls that beginning skaters usually lean in the wrong direction, and only through practice do they learn to glide in alignment on the ice. Living to a mid-life age, women come to know life takes practice, too. Experiencing the “over and over again” of aligned, balanced, daily living takes women to a place of maturity. Mature beings appreciate the role balance plays on the journey. Cindy has learned this instinctively; she knows that balance is the “float place” that provides ease and harmony in space and time. The balance required in mid-life is realized in her physical being as she balances on the fluid and frozen forms of water, the place of “in-between.”

Water’s Bridge Between Worlds: The Dock

The dock is used to cross over the “in-between” that separates the boat from the land. The dock is described by Cindy as a place she “...goes to after work...loves

to walk because it leads to her cocoon...feels like I am on vacation.” Cindy has come to know the difference between land and sea places. She says land represents a place of work, and the boat represents a place of home. Docks both connect and separate these places of being in the world. Cindy’s boat resides “200 feet away from the earth and mud,” and the dock makes it easier to go between the two. If a sailor works on land, the dock is considered a necessary passage way because it enables her to access land, yet be separate from it. If a land based sailor wants to experience the “in-between” place of being on the water, standing on the dock provides access to the feeling of being at sea. When a sailor wants to return to home, the dock serves as her only way back to the boat. Docks keep land away, provide an “in-between” feeling, and take a sailor home.

Providing equilibrium between the lived ways of the sea and land life, the dock serves as a wooden fulcrum for balance. Mid-life women live in both worlds-- of the “in-between,” an inner journey coupled with the practical existence of everyday living. The docks of life help us journey between and enjoy both. Donna calls living in a marina with docks a “half-way” place of being.

For people just starting out sailing, docks at marinas are a bridge. You are not really cruising when you are in a marina. There, you have laundry and power. Marinas are security and make life easy. You do not have to worry about dragging anchor. They have some bad things, too. They can be noisy, lack privacy, the other boats can obstruct the view of the beautiful water; you feel buried some times because you do not have a wide open place to be in, and you feel closed in. I am hoping we do not have many marinas in our lives. I think it is a sort of half-way, “in-between” place in this life. Some people never make the jump from them, and they are happy with this half-way life. (Donna)

Marinas are a “half-way” way place of being on a sea voyage. Beckoning sailors to their waiting docks, they are land places that support matrixes of wooden arms that reach out over the “in-between” place of the water. They are not of the “in-between” place of dwelling. They are a journey’s “stopping off” place, providing mid-life women with a sense of security, day-to-day convenience, and land-based power. Donna cautions, if women stay there too long, marinas can invade their privacy, bury them, confine their being, and obstruct their horizontal view. She has come to know women who never leave the marinas as living “half-way.” Half-way lives are not “in-between,” and marina women unable to release themselves from this “coming from” place remain in their remembered ways. Pausing on their way to Avalon, they are “stopping off” for a spell, dwelling in their past ways of being. Donna’s call cautions them not to “stop off” too long for they might forget they are on their way to the sea, to home, to the place “in-between.”

Water: My Home “In-between”

Having a home on the water makes sailors different from “land lovers,” and this difference creates tension, an opportunity to mine meaning. Voyagers arrive at ports of call from places outside the view of land. They appear from over the horizon out of no where, and others of the land consider them perpetual visitors, people with “one foot out the door,” transients. A *transient* is one who can “cross over” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 827). To experience the life of a transient being is to come to know the meaning of crossing over on a journey to another place. The natural, transient way of cruisers makes them ripe for journey. Knowing the importance of the familiar, they

bring their homes along as they cross the place of “in-between.” Residing in the place of “in-between,” cruising women find a home on the sea.

Home is the place where women see patterns in familiar ways of lived life. It is in this home of the “in-between” that they consider new ways of being. This home place of being comes with us on the journey of crossing over to Avalon.

From the moment we are born, we seem compelled to travel homeward. In places and people we seek that elusive feeling of being welcomed. Home is the goal of the epic journey of the human spirit. (Lawlor, 1997, p. 40)

Barney has a song that she sings; its main verse is “I will never leave this boat, this is my home.” It is a popular verse sung in chorus with Cindy and Gina. Using the land only for the bare necessities, like groceries, laundry, and fuel, Barney is committed to living a “complete life” on her boat. Having chosen not to own a land home, she is passionate for others to come to know her boat as her place of dwelling, her home. “Home is our origin; it is the place to which we must return. ‘Home’ is a command option on my key board; pressing it, I return the cursor to the left margin, wherein my text begins” (Pagh, 2001, p. xv). Sailors like Barney, consider their boats as places of origin, the place where their text begins.

The uninitiated (those who are not familiar with the sea way) do not know the hidden ways of being within the vessels. They do not know boats have stoves, fresh water, beds and toilets. They do not know the comforts that lie within. Barney and all the sea muses do their best to inform interested others. Spreading the word about the way of the sea world is part of their way of being. Gina has “adopted” a younger cruising couple who are considering this way for themselves. To “adopt” a couple

means that Gina invites them onboard for dinner on more than one occasion and initiates them to the joys and conveniences of being a modern cruiser. Gina prepares her famous pasta and shows them the “normal” way of living on a boat. Laughter and camaraderie permeate the experience, for Gina’s love of this life is hard to miss. To be at home in the “in-between” place of the journey, and to share that way with others reveals the meaning of this chosen life. Though the way is hidden from view, it is not a secret. All one has to do is hearken to the calls of the muses; they will help you come to know that this home of the “in-between” leads voyaging women to Avalon.

Seen from Cindy’s vessel, the fixed view of the horizon is part of her place of home; it, too, is a familiar location to which her being returns. Horizons reveal everything both behind her and in front of her, but it is the horizon seen from her present place of being that establishes the range of her vision. It does not matter which direction she is facing; all aspects of the view are familiar to her.

The place that is the horizon is at a point, and when you are on a moving boat, you can reach it. If you travel in a straight line, and whether you can actually see the point with your eyes or not, you sense the familiar; you are “there” just in a different place. (Cindy)

Gadamer (1960/1989) suggests that for us to come to know the deeper meaning of horizontal views we should not allow ourselves to be limited by what is nearby. Horizons travel with us. The one behind follows us. The one in front comes closer. The ones on either side travel in tandem. Fusing the backward, sideward, and forward views of the horizon into one panorama will enable us to see beyond them all. Opening us to the meaning of the journey “in-between,” it is this act of unifying horizontal views that brings us to a deeper understanding (Gadamer, 1960/1989).

Cindy's unique way of knowing horizons as familiar, "coming closer" places joins with Gadamer's voice, and together they bring us to know that the journey to deeper understanding is not always unfamiliar or one that causes unease. It can be a familiar, reachable, and enjoyable experience, just like coming home.

Some people arrive at Avalon and never know it because for them the place of Avalon does not feel unfamiliar. The horizon ahead reveals a new place which feels like a "going back" place, and, therein, explains their lack of knowing when they arrive. As beings fix their gaze on the distant horizon, not all experience the thrill of pending discovery. Rather, as Cindy says, they see the place of horizon, away from the "earth and the mud," and for some it is quite familiar; it is like coming home.

Horizontal places of home are the familiar places of continual going back-to. "Jesus returns to his heavenly Father. Moses leads his people to back to their homeland. Buddha reaches the immovable spot of enlightenment beneath the Bo tree" (Lawlor, 1997, p. 40). For sailors on a voyage, feelings of home are found on the journey toward the distant horizon that, Cindy reminds us, does not recede when we approach and is always reachable. It is just a "sea illusion" that causes the appearance of a receding horizon, ever beyond our reach. Within their vessels in route to a familiar horizon, women who journey "in-between" experience a feeling of home. Mid-life travels can be a phase in the journey of "returning to" a familiar Avalon.

The "in-between" place of journey, mid-life, can be a place of reflection, renewal, balance, and being home. It is a place where women revisit and reconsider

their places of being while on their life journey. “Way to” themes are revealed in the reconsideration of place and reflecting on the meaning of time.

Every Day Is Friday

Donna calls to me, “Every day is Friday.” During a sea voyage, sailors come to know a different way of time. Land clocks measure hours and minutes for purposes of navigation. The inner clocks of sailing women, however, operate within a “time-free” zone. Their vague sense of time creates a way of being where every day is Friday. To reconsider time as experienced by mid-life sea women opens a way to meaning in route to Avalon.

The Cruising Clock

Donna reflects on the unique way she has experienced time as a cruiser.

You keep track of the seasons, but you lose track of the days. We get up at 7 or 9 each morning; it really does not matter just as long as we accomplish what needs to be done in the day...So the hours are not important...You do not mark your time by what others are doing, but what you are doing...Anticipation of what you are going to do rather than just acceptance (is how time is considered). (Donna)

Donna lives in a world of No More Mondays (Micher, 2002). The hour of the day and the people around her are less relevant to how time is considered; she measures time by her being’s desires. She has come to know a relationship with time by which she influences it rather than being influenced by it. Gina echoes that sense when she proclaims full-time cruisers “go where ever, do what ever, when ever they feel like it.” Perhaps cruising women on a voyage through the “in-between” place of the sea have developed a unique sense of time that elicits a perception of control over

this invisible element of day-to-day life. Such feelings of empowerment have been considered by Bolen (1994) as necessary for reaching Avalon.

Donna also voices a loss of “middle time,” which is a sense of time amnesia when it comes to the hours of the day and the days of the week. This amorphous place of “time less” being was experienced by all the women in the study. Gina sums it up with, “There are no 24 hour days when you are out cruising, Barb; the days meld into each other.” Each woman shared stories with me about missed appointments, being late for meetings, or forgetting children’s birthdays. Though none missed the meeting times for our conversations, my occasional questioning of “What time is it?” was often met with a blank stare.

Cruising women have come to know a slowing down of time to the point of its non-existence. Flaherty (1999) says that time slows during times of high or low task complexity. As previously revealed, cruising women live in both an extreme and complex environment, coupled with a calm and simplistic life-style. Experiencing extreme weather and mastering technical equipment is contrasted with laid-back moments of basking in the sun. The resulting slowing of time in this “in-between” place of being has brought women to believe that they have caught up with that elusive element of land life, time. Having now caught it, they feel they are the masters of their own ships. It is they who decide when the vessel sails, to where, and with whom.

Working as an occupational therapist in the hospital, Barney recalls her experience of lived time. The work-a-day life of daily intrusions and distractions

seemed to control every aspect of her being, leaving her feeling tense and stressed. The time for work, family responsibilities, and social events was tightly controlled to insure all activities fit into one day. Driven by the “going to” and “coming from” places of the land, everyday destination achievement claimed all her time. Cruising women have come to a way of knowing that breaks with the imprisoning ways of traditional time, and brings them to a “me first” child’s sense of control over it. Children’s perceptions of time lack mastery of the skill for “synchronizing their way of knowing with the intersubjective time that is measured by clocks and calendars” (Flaherty, 1999, p. 103). Thus, they react to the ways of time with an expressed immediacy as if time were there to serve them, “now.” The perception of time, in the “in-between” world brings us back to that innocent way of being. Life seems slower as women go round-and-round, returning to their earlier perception that time is not synchronized with subject or event. Rather, it is for them to control, or perhaps, even forget.

Donna reflects, “The hours are not important.” She considers life like a “time-free” thinker. “Time-free thinking refers to occasions when people completely lose track of time” (Levine, 1997, p. 46). Art teachers know students are on the road to artistic competence when they lose track of time (Levine, 1997). When the person is outside herself, her self-conscious state of being is gone, and she completely is absorbed in the task at hand; it is said she has arrived at an experience called “flow” (Levine, 1997, p. 47). Flow is a state of being where clocks no longer serve as useful analogs of the temporal quality of lived experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). *Flow*

is the way of water; it means “to flood” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 289) an act that fills in with a force of motion that moves one along. On their boats, cruisers are in the flow of the “in-between” water way. With self-consciousness gone, living outside the self, becoming filled up, and experiencing the time of endless Fridays, sailors are well on the way to Avalon.

The Right Time

For Cindy, now is the time to live on a boat; full-time cruising to distant ports will come later. She reflects, “The cruising part of this life is not the only thing. There is something about just living on a boat that I absolutely adore. It has something to do with the process of redoing it, sanding it, painting it, and making it cozy.” Cindy has chosen this time in her life to reshape and redefine her vessel. Her life journey enjoys a “stopping-off” place in time, while she considers the voyage ahead. Mid-life is a time when women take stock and consider their path. For some, it may not be a time of experiencing every day as Friday. Some women still need an occasional Monday as they consider the way ahead.

Gloria knows the meaning of the right time to journey; it is when the “Friday” comes to be, that is, it actually comes into one’s way of being. “This is the time when you look back and wonder, ‘What have I done with my life?’ It is time to give your self a time allowance; give yourself another 40 years to live before it is too late.” The common call of time running out comes during a woman’s mid-life. Reminding us it is time to wake up and get going, the menopausal alarm goes off in our biological

clock. There is only so much time allowed to get on the path. Gloria urges us to “get going.”

You feel so drained. Menopausal time for women is waking up to see life slipping away. It is about wanting to be somebody. You want to be someone special. You do not value your body when you are young. Then, bang, one day your menstruation is playing games. You are getting edgy, and you wake up in the world and wonder what is next? (Gloria)

To awaken with perceptions of your life slipping away, of missed opportunities, and failing to feel “special” leaves some mid-life women wondering, “What is next for me?” Mid-life becomes a “right now” time for new beginnings, and it comes as no surprise that when women begin the journey they may chose eccentric ways.

Eccentric ways are not necessarily extreme or exotic. *Eccentric* means “not having the same center” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 230). The efforts made at this important time of life focus on re-centering one’s being, pulling it out of the round-and-round circle of the journey, placing it in the center of the roundabout, and looking for a new entry point or way of traveling on to Avalon.

When family members reached a certain age, Barney knew it was the right time to live in the “in-between” place of Friday’s way.

We waited until the kids were grown. Then, we became a member of the ‘sandwich generation.’ We had aging parents as well as the kids to consider, but we went cruising anyway. You can wait yourself to death. What are you going to do wait until your parents die before you go? You have to live your own life, and try to still be part of theirs. At least for us that is what needed to happen. (Barney)

Right times never come if you are “waiting yourself to death.” To wait the endless wait of life can become a living death. Living the only life you have been given, yet, being respectful of the needs of others is Barney’s found way. She worries that if

women do not listen for the right moment to seek a Friday way of life, they may be left standing on the shore.

The characters in Waiting for Godot (Beckett, 1954), experience an endless waiting for the arrival of a person that never appears, Godot. During their wait, the characters consider the purpose of a life based on one's continual waiting for the right time. The reader comes to realize two things; first, life is a waiting game, and second, what one does during the wait is important. Barney has chosen to grab for the "Everyday is Friday" way of life, now. Like Cindy, she knows that there will be stopping-off times when she pauses to wait for awhile, but she also has come to know that what she does while she waits matters and can continue to shape her being.

The right time for mid-life women to cruise varies, but when they choose to journey "in-between," they come to know that the timeless way of being in the world where feelings of "Everyday is Friday" awaits them. Barney has come to know that meeting family obligations partially fills our time of "stopping-off" to wait, and that these needed activities can be carried out even if our clocks are set to cruising time. Cindy knows that having the cruising life is about balance; sometimes we wait and other times we sail. Gloria reminds us, however, we better get on the path soon for time is flying by. The call to journey is heard at different times for each woman, but eventually the call is hearkened by all, and whenever we choose to leave, Avalon awaits.

Ready to go. Barney reminds me that "The boat must always be stowed and ready to voyage at any time." She is committed to keeping the boat, "ready to go."

Small mementoes and pictures of family and friends modestly decorate her boat's shelves and walls. The broad flat counter surfaces, however, are uncluttered and ready to receive charts and other sailing paraphernalia necessary for an ocean voyage.

Though they are attached by a dock to land for the winter, she does not consider her boat part of the land; it is still in the place of "in-between." She boasts that she has not "put down roots," a cruising phrase used to describe a cruiser who accumulates land possessions, such as picnic tables, lawn chairs, plants and storage sheds. Only dock lines hold her to the land; the boat is free and clear to leave at any time.

I do want to be staying here (on land). We have been staying here longer than we have been anyplace, and I do not want a storage bin. I do not want anything taken off the boat. I want to be able to go. I do not want to put roots on land. I love staying here and getting to know the community, but I do not want roots here. I want the boat stowed and ready to go. (Barney)

"Ready to Go"

Ready, set, go,
 Today-away?
 Ready, set, go,
 No, not today.
 Ready, set, go.
 Some debts to pay.
 Then, ready, set, flee.
 I am off to sea,
 no ties on me. (Schaefer, 2003)

The preparation to voyage is when we make ready to continue another phase of life's journey. When the call to this mid-life journey is heard, women consider how this "crossing over" affects their experience of place, time, and human relationships (van Manen, 1990). Mid-life, the place of "in-between," does not have to be hooked

to a land's way of chronological measurement. Mid-life journeys are realized when a woman answers the call to experience Gina's "everyday is Friday" way of being. The intensity of the call and her moving toward it depend on the circumstances of the woman. Barney reminds us, however, to be ready always because the call to Avalon can come at any time. Dee chimes in reminding us that our enthusiastic desire to include all women in the journey does not mean we journey all together. Departure times differ depending on a woman's readiness to learn.

Ready to learn. Dee recalls a story about a cruising woman whose husband recently died. Left alone to live on the sailboat, and not knowing how to sail it alone, she turned to Dee for instruction. Though the woman was open to learning, she was not "ready to learn." Her fundamental knowledge about boats and their operating systems was non-existent. She did not know the basic techniques of propelling a moving vessel through the water. Because the woman had little cruising experience upon which to build, Dee was unable to teach her this content. "Readiness to learn" not only requires that beings be open to the prospect of learning, they also must be knowledgeable enough to be transformed by the experience. When the time comes to receive the call to learn, one has to be *primed* to become filled up.

To *prime* is the "first step in the operation of some device" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 600). A fuel hose on a boat engine can carry fuel only if it is primed. That is, the lumen is filled from one end of the hose to the other with the petroleum liquid. If dead space is left in the hose, a vacuum forms, the hose can not carry fuel, and the engine can not be filled up. The woman's fuel line to becoming is not "primed."

Dee has come to know that enthusiasm and openness are not enough to enable one to embrace that which is presented and travel to a “ready to learn” time. This experience of time requires readiness predicated on a primed state of being, one that is prepared to take on more of life’s experiences. “Readiness to learn” time requires a state of being that consists of more than just a smile and a nod, accompanied by a wish and a prayer. Women may hear the call, but are unable to answer because their being is not yet primed, and sometimes, they need help just to get primed for learning. A woman does not come to know the lessons of mid-life all at once or at the same rate as another. At any point in life women go back and review, or learn for the first time, basic themes from life’s lesson book, and it is enlightened beings who come to know the differing pace at which women learn and come to maturity and wisdom (P. Levin, 1988).

Time in the cruising world takes on new meaning as it is measured, not in years, but in one’s readiness to learn. On the way to Avalon, each woman learns life lessons at different times. As the mid-life research shows (Erikson, 1950; Fordor, 1990) some life tasks seem specifically linked to chronological age, but as sailors have come to know, a state of readiness to learn can not be attached to a chronological clock. Each sailor is different with regard to what she needs to learn and when. Previous voyages have shaped the knowledge of women sailors, leaving gaps in what they have stored. Some, as a result, have to ask fellow travelers for help to get “primed” for filling. Others require the extended hand of experienced

journeywomen who have gone before, those who have experienced portions of the journey and can show them the way.

The “everyday is Friday” way of being in the sea world comes only when persons are ready to learn its ways. Dee reminds us that we have an obligation to teach others the sailing way. Gina adds that to do so “validates our life choice as cruiser.” As educators, sailors, and women, we can reach back and “prime” the willing to help them become ready. As exemplified in the ritual called the “ancient circle of croning” (Randall-May, 1999, p. 6), women who have stopped menstruating were initiated into a “wise woman’s club” (Randall-May, p. 6). To be a member of the club one had to be at least 40 years old. Women members came together to share the stories and experiences of their current decade of life. The moments of honest sharing gave participants the priceless gift of a new vision and a hopeful pattern for living (Randall-May). Those who are older facilitate the passage “in-between” for those that follow. This female way of being in the world mirrors the cruising way of the sailing community. Both lived relationships support a woman’s solitary journey in the company of others.

A new sense of time is experienced by women on a journey. It is measured by the moments and experiences, rather than the minutes and hours of the day. They do not fear the measured loss of minutes and hours as much as the missed moments of opportunity to live a fuller life. My cruising muses have come to know that journeys provide women the opportunity to experience a few extra Fridays per week, coupled

with flowing, going, and learning ways. Time reconsidered reveals the way to Avalon.

“Lived Time Is Endless Moments”

Tic tock goes the clock
 Cruisers measure time in moments.
 We awaken the moment of sun rise.
 We sleep the moment the sun flies.
 We eat during moments of hunger.
 We delight during moments of summer.

Tic tock goes the clock
 Cruisers measure life in moments.
 Moment one, we want fun.
 Moment two, we look for you.
 Moment three, we leave for sea.
 Moment four, we sail some more.

Tic tock goes the cruising clock
 Its face is blank; its hands are fingered.
 It grabs for moments and wants to linger.
 Holding moments as if they are fleeting,
 Knowing all the while cruising time reshapes being. (Schaefer, 2003)

It is not only time reconsidered that reveals meaning. As they reconsidered their relationships with Others in a process of “pulling away,” the mid-life women cruisers in this study all came to discover new ways of becoming. To *pull away* is a phrase used when the boat leaves a dock or the proximity of another vessel. The word *pull* means to “draw toward or out” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 617), and *away* means to “go to another place” (p. 50). Thus, the act of pulling away means to be drawn to another place, an act which implies the presence of a force that is compelling, not unlike hearkening to a call.

Pulling Away

Leaving Others and possessions behind are reoccurring themes voiced in the muse's call. The life of sailing women is a series of separations from the land and Others. It is a continuous cycle of leaving and returning to the land and its inhabitants. Separation occurs often and every day. Frequency of exposure to separating ways leads one to reflection. Donna's experience with *beings far* reveals how separation from Others causes an internal reconsideration of the self. We come to know our being in relationship to whom and what we have left behind. We come to know our self through separation and being alone.

Being Alone

Dee lives a solitary life on board her boat. *Solitary* means "alone" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 737). However, she is quick to remind me, that being alone is not the same as withdrawal, hiding, or cocooning. *Alone* also means "al" + "one" or all together as one. Dee admits to having an attitude of not requiring people to be "in my face," but she truly enjoys the experience of people coming around for a visit and partaking in her chosen way.

Solitary living does not imply withdrawing from others; that way of being, says Dee, is called "cocooning" or a state of mere continuation. "Cocooning is a form of non-participation in the larger existence." Dee has come to know that the solitary life of living alone on a boat is a "clean" relationship with Nature that requires "living in harmony with a larger existence." The cruising life is a solitary life lived in the company of others.

Koch (1994) reflects on the value of solitude to the evolution of a woman. In the busy everyday life of women, solitude is difficult to come by, but if one is able, the benefits of freedom, attunement to self, attunement to Nature, reflective perspective, and creativity will follow. We come to our self through our solitude, a “...time when experience is disengaged from others” (Koch, p. 27). Solitude is a curious time when we gaze back from the absolute center of our being and our mind is the only voice (Koch). When we enter the place of solitude we catch up with the child within us, the one who looks from her solitary place upon the busy world. Alienated by the ways of the adult world, she uses her solitude as a place of work and self creation. She enters herself to take part in the “...unending creation of the life you choose to live” (Koller, as cited in Koch, 1994, p. 271). Solitude teaches us how to live a life that we do not control. The inmost teaching of solitude shows us “...how to watch with braver eyes Destiny at the work of bunching together the variegated sprigs of heaven and hell that make up the posy we call life” (Gale, 1913, p. 56).

Dee recalls an example of sea solitude that has inspired her way of being in the world. Pelagic sea birds come to the land only for the purpose of mating. They keep their own company and get their sustenance from the sea. She reflects on the similarity she shares with a pelagic bird. Dee comes to the land to socialize with Others and to find temporary employment, both activities needed to fill her vessel. The sea, however, is her solitary place; it is what sustains her soul. Koch (1994) shares the notion that solitude is a human way that does not deny the need for human relationships or our attainment of transcendence, but rather it is found along a soulful

road which winds somewhere in-between both territories. The sea, the place of “in-between” located somewhere between the place of Others and the place of the soul, is the source of Dee’s sustenance; it is the place of her becoming. The sea is the solitary way to her soul.

Solitude’s soulful search is a journey to our innermost place, the absolute center where our mind is the only voice (Koch, 1994). Heidegger (1953/1956) illuminates us to the possibility that the soul can not exist without the Others with whom we come together. He says of our souls that each are “...appealing to a being which in conformity with its kind is suited to come together with any being whatsoever. This distinctive being... ‘the being whose nature it is to meet with all other beings,’ is the soul” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 12). Echoing Dee’s call, the solitary ways of the cruising life, lived in the company of others, bring us to our soul.

Moore’s (1992) consideration of the soul further reminds us that the aim of soul reflection is to bring us to realize a fully lived life that is connected to society, Nature, family, nation and globe. The idea of soulful living is to be “profoundly connected in the heart of ancestors and to living brothers and sisters in all the many communities that claim our hearts” (Moore, 1992, p. xviii). To find the soul through solitary reflection leads us to a greater sense of connection with the world. Sailing is a solitary way of being that ultimately brings us from the independent ways of pelagic sea beings to the roosting and “stopping-off” activities of connected whole global beings.

The experience of being alone with Nature was shared in Anne's experience on her cruise to Hawaii. She reflects on having a feeling of being insignificant while sailing in her "itty bitty sail boat out on the ocean." Feelings of insignificance cause us to feel a sense of unimportance and irrelevance in the world which, in turn, leads to our sense of isolation and having been left behind. As Palmer (2000) reminds us, we find our bottom and from there the only way is up. Times of feeling insignificant present opportunities for reflection, as women grapple with their sense of purpose in the broader scheme of things. Reconsideration of the self in relation to Others realigns one's sense of self in the world, and that is an important relationship to peel back. From the meaning that comes forward our very rebirth ensues.

Cindy adds to our knowing of the meaning of absence and the accompanying sense of nothingness.

When I am sailing, and we are moving it is kind of neat to watch the horizon and see things getting closer. You see a buoy, and then...if you see nothing, you see something. That horizon is something, yet there is nothing there. Even if there is no buoy, it is still a place that gets closer. You have to be there. I can not put words on it. If you are in an ocean and you are moving, that horizon of nothing is getting closer. (Cindy)

As they experience the natural world of the sea, Anne's struggle to define feelings of insignificance and Cindy's sense of nothingness are really struggles of finding themselves in the scheme of things. Understanding our sense of being, separate and away from the Other, begins our coming to terms with this struggle. According to Levinas (1961/1969), separation is the route to personal unification of the self with the self. Seen through his lens, experiencing feelings of insignificance, isolation, and separateness is to begin the process of reacquainting with one's self. Being alone and

enjoying solitude is the sailing way. If considered as an opportunity to reunite with the self, perhaps it is, in fact, a way that can lead to our rebirth.

Cruising is an experience of being alone in the company of others. As each ship inevitably departs the anchorage to continue its voyage, sailors know that the gathering of like Others ultimately results in separation from each other. Though sailors may sail for awhile in tandem, ultimately they know there is a point of departure and separation from the association as each sails toward their own horizon. Sailors spend long periods alone, and it is during this time of separation from Others, they open themselves to opportunities for illumination and redefinition of their way of being in the world. Isolation and separation provide opportunities to consider the “empty nest” place in mid-life.

Emptying the Nest

Some women empty their nests by being the first to leave. Gina recalls her “strong and difficult decision” to leave the home nest before her son. Allowing her child to remain in the nest she had so lovingly created for them, Gina, at age 40, flew to the sea life. Her son stayed behind to be raised on the land, while Gina’s “mid-life crisis” opened the way for her move into her “sea-soned” vessel. *Seasoned* reveals a “ripened...improved flavor” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 699) of another way. Her early departure from the nest was fueled by the compelling urge to be of the sea.

I was meant to do this, and I will do it the rest of my life...I got tired of the suburbs and the Jones and the Smiths. I started sailing the last two years before I moved onboard. I started flying everywhere getting on every crew I could get on. I had always sailed. I grew up on the water. I was not a racer; I was a cruiser. (Gina)

Buying a powerboat, she and her previous husband had tried to experience the boating life together, but Gina “did not like that scene. It was like driving a car on the water.” Gina needed a sailing life on a cruising sailboat, and she needed it during her mid-life years. Living on her sailing home, Gina has built a new nest. She is joined by her son who visits her often. He is part of her new life, and shares in her unique place of being on the sea. Gina knows she has given him a lasting gift in his coming to know the freedom of living and cruising on a boat. Sea memories of this unique way of being in the world shape the way he journeys through life.

The call of the mid-life journey can be strong and compelling. Women who hearken to the call are extraordinary in their courage to actualize their desired way of being in world. Following her instincts, rather than the social norm, and being secure enough to know that she would always be a part of their life, Gina left her children in the comfort of the land’s feathered nest. Women fly when they must, and just like Cindy whose time to journey has not yet arrived, women choose the time carefully. Reprioritizing one’s needs takes careful planning, but is a necessary step for women to take in order to reach Avalon.

Linda also left the home nest before her children flew. She hearkened the call to a mid-life journey and caught the next boat leaving the dock. She reflects on the positive aspects of reprioritizing her needs.

My relationship with the kids is good; my son is older and is off and running. I do not see him a lot, he has a job. My daughter is really still in my life. While she lives in a house on the land, she has moved into this boat life with me. I am separated from her father so I am living a divorced life. My part of that life is living on the boat, and it works perfectly. I have time to play with her, and we do really cool things... Yesterday, I took her with me... We

delivered a boat down to Annapolis, and we had a blast. Living on a boat incorporates all parts of my changing life... I knew that living on a boat would simplify my life, and simplifying it, enabled me to focus on the important things, like my daughter. (Linda)

Mid-life is a “growing more” time that is influenced by our family relationships. Linda has come to know that one’s time for experiencing a “changing life” is affected by unique life circumstances: personality, life-style support systems, and expectations of the future (Grambs, 1989). “Departure of children stimulated them [women] to revive their intellectual skills, to develop intimacy with others, and to become more goal oriented” (Grambs, p. 123). Linda has come to know that the day-to-day separation from her daughter has challenged her to seek new career ventures, rediscover the importance of friends, and redirect her changing way of life in ways that ultimately benefit her. When I last spoke with Linda she was applying to begin her education as a Licensed Practical Nurse.

When Linda left the old nest for the new one at sea, she reached back to invite her “stressed out” and troubled friends to visit with her there. On the boat Linda came to appreciate the simple and important things of life, things that were not being addressed in previous ways of being. She recalls that they “always felt better after having been with me on the boat.” I am sure a hearty portion of *Teddygramms* had something to do with it.

The sailing life redesigns our nests and gives us a sense of being alone, yet, still being part of the lives of those separate from us. Women have come to know that leaving the old nest and redesigning a new one provides opportunities for evolved relationships with separated others. The boat nest becomes a place to accommodate a

woman's evolving interests in her self, her career, academic pursuits, or community involvement. "Empty nest" no longer describes the new home of mid-life sailing women. For Gina and Linda, the boat is seldom empty as their children revel in the new place of their mother's becoming. Perhaps a *nest* constructed by a soul refilled becomes a "snug retreat" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 503) for both her and those left on land. Emptying one's nest enables a woman to reconstruct her dwelling place in reconsidered ways. Old preconceived ways of being in the world are thrown to the wind as a woman refeathers her new place of being to accommodate the arrival of loved ones. Refeathering a nest requires careful choosing of sticks, string, feathers, and leaves. Placed just so, the new place of comfort becomes a sturdy place of protection and nurturing as Others seek her out.

The process of emptying the nest is part of the experience of the voyage. Realizing the experience of reprioritizing goals is part of the mid-life journey illuminating the way to Avalon, but the act of separating from the beings in the nest can be difficult. Barney's father showed her a way to ease the pain when parents relocate to new nests.

I remember as a young adult, my parents visited me. They had an ability to come in and just participate in your life and not behave as guests you waited on...He did not want to go to restaurants. He wanted to be part of the life he was visiting. Then, he could imagine you in that life when he left. It was familiar; it helped him get to know how the person lived. Later, when you get them on the phone...it provides a 'comfort zone' for them knowing what your world was like. I can relate to that. I wanted to see the colleges where my kids attended, and then I felt better. (Barney)

Experiencing the reality of another's place of being makes that place part of your reality; familiarity breeds comfort. To ease the pain of departure for those being left

behind, Barney has come to know the importance of sharing the physical space of her conscious way of life with loved ones. Conscious ways of being in a place become a being's physical and spiritual reality. "Once we've seen something consciously, we can never be unconscious of it again" (Small, 1995, p. 47); we incorporate it into our being. By consciously choosing a different way of experiencing the world, we may set ourselves apart from our families. Small (1995) helps us come to terms with this separation by suggesting that such bold new beginnings are sacred and vital for humanity as a whole. I have a more modest reflection of my chosen way of life. Those us who brave transformational journeys dip into humankind's bottomless well of courage and seek ways to illuminate meaning for the benefit of those we love. It takes time and effort to convey to others the meaning of our new consciousness.

Our travels may take us far from familiar places and people, and as the Others no longer physically present in our lives await our call, they may experience feelings of abandonment and the sting of our absence. The pain of our leaving the nest can be eased through reestablishing sensory connections with those left behind.

My children have been trained to our cell phone minutes. If they call during the day or during the week we have them call back. My daughter is doing her internship in the Dominican Republic and her host father died. She was so upset so we had to talk with her quite a bit on the phone. The time of day she called did not matter. It was important for her to be there and go through it. We helped her and told her how important it was to have had known him... We shared time with her on the phone and now we have those memories. So she is doing much better. Now I just send extra Emails and send her pictures of us. (Barney)

The sound of a spoken voice connects persons when they are unable to be in each other's presence. To dwell with another through spoken communication reminds us

how the invisible voice soothes the soul and creates the “comfort zone” of being with another. Even without experiencing physical touch, hearing the voice of an Other creates lasting memories. Sensory communication of touch and sound is lasting, yet, through the guidance of Abram (1996), I have also come to know that the ways of written communication awaken senses long made dormant by the day-to-day.

Barney “loves to get Emails on the boat.” Making the Other more than a memory, the power of electronically written words strengthens our relationship with *beings far*. As they wait for the next message to come through, they become active participants in the cruiser’s experience. Barney’s use of her boat’s Email system keeps relationships with family and friends, both on the land and sea, alive. When it comes to communicating with those no longer near, she actually prefers electronic mail to the phone. As she composes her message to waiting others, she enjoys the reflective time that precedes her formulated thoughts. Arranging them in such a way as to attempt to convey the ways of her becoming, she struggles with the words. It is the shape of her sentences that reflects the shape of her mind (Metzger, 1992). Through the process of writing, “The muse takes us out of our little life and thrusts us into the world...” (Metzger, 1992, p. 190).

Barney uses Email to support and comfort friends during their troubled times of life. She says, “Recalling stories of moments and common memories shared with another provides them with comfort during times of stress.” They breathe in her spirit as she breaths out the words (Metzger, 1992). Barney also has come to know that an Email message sent to someone far away is like a gift. Messages received from

beings in far away places are like exotic treasures. The recipient treats the correspondence with a sense of excitement and urgency. It is as if the distance traveled makes the message all the more special; they boast about it to their friends. Acts of singling someone out and selecting them for this special gift draws *beings far* closer to the sender. For cruisers, Email is not merely a flat screen messaging system; it is an electrified hand reaching out trying to “keep in touch.” Reaching out from far distances in this energized form of communication sends an unspoken message that the ongoing connection with the other is valued. Sometimes the words do not even matter; it is the gesture that speaks volumes. “Words are like air...look through them but not at them” (Grigg, 1990, p. 119).

Barney also knows that with Email or any type of written communications there may be time gaps from the moment the message is sent to when it is retrieved. This delay diminishes the effect of immediacy that accompanies urgent family calls. For those types of pleas, Barney breaks with her love of Email and reaches for the phone. Sometimes the sound of a live voice is needed; urgent callings require “real time” responses at sea. She has come to know that responding to urgent calls is best experienced by creating “comfort zones” through actual or voiced presence with Others. If the call is less compelling, the written word suffices nicely to reveal the inner workings of the woman’s thoughts and demonstrates her active interest in staying in touch. Women at sea know that any and all means of transmitting their sense of presence to others left behind helps reconnect the being.

A sailor who “disappears” from the Other’s view during her transformational journey is a being “which never shows itself for structural reasons” (Leder, 1990, p. 27). Leder says, “To ‘disappear’ in this sense is simply to not-appear” (p. 27). The reconsideration of the word, disappear, does not imply a state of total absence of both physical and mental connectivity; rather, beings that disappear are still available; they have only disappeared from a previous way of appearing. Those beings physically left behind may experience a sense of abandonment and total loss because of tactile and visual separation from the other. Pain of separation can be eased if Barney’s connecting “comfort zones” are created. As we journey to Avalon, we can ease the pain of our physical disappearance with non-physical communication links.

Total Loss

The ultimate separation between beings is the one caused by complete separation from the Other, death. This final way of being has no “comfort zone.” Echoes of fear reverberate as the experience of this final way of being is shared by these sailing women. Donna’s insightful reflection gives meaning to her consideration of death as a wife and sailor.

You talk about loss. To lose him (her husband) over board would be the worst thing. Permanent absence, I think about it; it is always in the back of my mind. “Man over board” is like losing a bit of me, too. It is permanent and since we are so dependent on each other it would be like losing a chunk of me. At sea you really are alone. You are out there and there is no one else to support you. There are no friends from home to bring over a casserole and all of that stuff. There is no funeral to go to. It is over--bang. Death is final for the one, and when coupled with the other being totally alone, it is a chilling and scary event. (Donna)

Thinking about this worst case scenario is part of the preparation for long distance cruising. Loss of a person overboard is a real possibility, and when that person is your loved one there are few words that can capture the feeling. As Cindy reminds us, when you see nothing, you see something. When Donna sees nothing in the place of the lost Other, she experiences feelings of “losing a chunk of me...no one else to support you...no friends from home.” Experiencing the presence of total nothingness, the being comes to know a sense of losing one’s self through the loss of the other. The presence of the Other “shapes the outside—my nature” (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 239). Only through the presence of the Other are we able to experience our own being.

Nothing is a state of “non-being” (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 22) where a once present being exists apart from all the “appeals of the world” (p. 39). Creating a sense of floating and groundlessness in those left behind, nothing forms an anguished void (Sartre, 1943/1956). In order to come to know what it means to be in the world, beings must experience this sense of nothingness and non-being. Sartre’s (1943/1956) knowing ways reveal to us that “Nothingness carries being in its heart” (p. 18).

A wave of anguish pierces the hearts of sailors as they come to know the presence of nothingness experienced by a “lost other” over board. When we lose all sensory perception of them, we come face to face with anguish or “Angst” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 175), a state of being where “The things at hand in the surrounding world sink away, and so do inner worldly beings in general” (p. 175). The lost one’s state of non-being is “total freedom” (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 39). This freedom is not Gloria’s joyful release from the oppressions and cares of the modern

world. The freedom Sartre (1943/1956) speaks of is a total discharge from being in the world; it is a state of nonexistence, unreality and emptiness.

In Cindy's way of knowing, the state of nothingness of things at hand yields something, and on a boat, that something may be a call to action, a call to rescue. As the crew responds to the absence of the Other, "The Other teaches me who I am" (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 250). All crew bear the burden of attempting to rescue the lost one. When trying to save the life of a victim, the M.O.M. (Man Overboard Module), a horseshoe shaped rescue device, is deployed overboard. It is no accident that the device has a feminine naming. It speaks to the expected role of the woman in maintaining relationships with Others. When crew or mates are lost at sea, a feeling of profound anguish comes into our being, and the thought of living with their nothingness state of being chills us to the bone. We learn to value them and take steps to keep them near.

Each time Donna comes on watch at the helm, she considers her role in the rescue of the Other as an act of staving off nothingness. To go to sea is to prepare for possible separation from Others; thus, in an attempt to be ready for the unexpected loss, we prepare ourselves to react to the possible realization of nothingness.

Thoughts of preventing the separation of a person from the boat construct a mental preparation ritual practiced by sailors standing watch. Donna has come to know, however, that rehearsing the events of the possible loss of an Other can not ease the pain of actual nothingness. The way to keep the pain of nothingness at bay is through prevention. Cruising women know conscious acts must be taken to keep all on board.

Sailors harness themselves to their vessel so as not to fall over board. Tethering them to Others in their lives, is an act of attachment that secures the ir being in the sea world.

Fearing for our safety in this place of solitude, Others are often concerned for our welfare. Barney recalls the reaction of her children to her departure to the sea.

My son became concerned about our safety, and he made us show him that the registration sticker was on the EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicator Relay Beacon) and that we had all the emergency stuff...The kids insisted we purchase a life raft; they saw it as cheap insurance for our safety. (Barney)

Bringing the separated back to others left behind is the purpose of rescue equipment. The desperate pleas for the reunification with separated loved ones are heard in the callings of Barney's children. The meaning of being separated is uncovered as loved ones define themselves in relation to the absent Other; they require "insurance for our safety." They require her assurance of eventual return.

As Donna knows, being without the other can be frightening and scary. Barney's knowing way voices the importance of taking measures to include others in her lived experience at sea. She does this by orienting them to the boat, actively communicating in ways that construct memories, and insuring a means for reunification with others in the future. Also, Dee reminds us that solitude, not absence, is the preferred way of being at sea for it enables us to reap the benefits of growth by reacquainting us with ourselves while in good company. Mid-life women on the way to Avalon have come to know that being alone in the company of others is the only way to journey.

Separating From Stuff

Stuff is the “quilted material used under chain mail” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 769). It provides comfort to the wearer. Deconstruction of one’s collection of possessions, or personal land comforts, enables persons to refashion a collection of new construction. This process of re-construction after de-construction reveals new meaning in one’s continuing life journey.

When she left the land for sea, Dee reconsidered her “owned” possessions. She says, “I have discovered the more possessions you have and the more involved you are with them, the more they own you instead of you owning them.” Gloria builds on this idea: “You do not own things because you can afford them. You own things because they can make a difference in your life, and they are useful.”

The stuff of life, that which we possess, is reconsidered at sea--land items that lure a sailor with their prevailing lack of usefulness. This seduction does not occur with needed possessions, those that are useful, for they make a difference in a sailor’s life at sea and do not cause distraction from the journey’s purpose. Gilligan (1982) suggests that women’s development of self occurs through acts of separation, and that attachments to items can be an impediment to one’s development. The call of the muses reveals their consideration of the way beings separate from possessions. Consideration of this theme brings us to meaning of their lived life at sea.

Possessions Anchor Being

Barney talks about going through possessions prior to moving aboard her boat. She was unable to part with items of the land so she put them in a storage place and left them behind.

Yes, I struggled with that (storage of possessions). It was too hard to go through and cut them all off. You can't just get rid of them...One of the kids may grow up fast enough to have their own home, and we can have the stuff delivered to their garage and some day go through it all. Looking back, I wish we had not stored the stuff, but we had to store it because we could not pare down enough at the time of our departure. (Barney)

Possessions require going through and paring down; they require reconsideration and passing around before their fate is decided. Scrutinizing the way they are in one's cruising life determines their final resting place. Are they coming with you, are they given away, or are they stored? The process of inclusion and elimination enlightens cruising woman as they consider their relationship with their collections of stuff.

Dee suggests that possessions are like anchors; they weigh you down and keep you stationary. Anchor was originally spelled *ancor* (Barnhart, 1995 p. 25). *An* is a prefix meaning "not" (p. 24), and *cor* means "together" (p. 161). An anchor at sea takes on a meaning of being "not together." It is a device or act that causes one to not be with another. Our possessions serve as anchors in many ways. Dee says they own us, and this can cause us to be separated from others around us. Forgetting Others who need our attention and love, the collecting of possessions and material wealth can bring one to experience distraction from those around us. As sailing women have

come to know, possessions that anchor being must be off-loaded, or the boat will not sail.

Some possessions are not totally useful in a practical sense; yet, they find their way on board the boat. They are items that invoke memories of those left behind, and as Barney reminds us, they are necessary to keep Others in our thoughts. Possessions that cause us to linger in the place of memory are similar to the actions of “drift anchors.” In a storm a “drift anchor” is deployed off the bow of the boat as a means of holding the boat in the safest position to meet on-coming waves and wind. Waiting out the storm, the boat stops moving and bobbing around in the water as it drifts slowly. If your journey is going too fast, a sea anchor slows you down. It gives sailors a moment of pause to collect their thoughts. Keeping possessions that provoke memories of loved ones may slow a woman’s journey. Remembering others by looking back and slowing down delays separation and holds us in place for a time; but, as Barney reminds us, it is sometimes necessary to slow down and “stop off” for awhile. Sometimes drifting in remembered ways of being is necessary. Beings that float along safely, though slowly, still arrive in Avalon, just a little later.

My mother is the keeper of my most precious land anchors, those possessions that I want to keep and return to after my sea journey. They are the stuff of my past from which I can not part. They story my memories, and that is why I keep them in her home for safe keeping. She says they remind her of me when I am out there floating at sea. They are her anchor to me. The possessions of my life anchor my

being to hers. Keeping loved ones from floating away, they serve as an anchor for Others to hold onto.

Possessions Free Being

Donna knows that possessions also support beings on board a boat. When carefully chosen items are brought on board a boat, they are elevated to a prestigious level. Giving them a welcome place on her boat, Donna talks about what makes certain items special.

I will not eat off plastic dishes, so I have ceramic plates. I have new things and some older things that I use to set the table. I do not have to set the table the same way each time. If you find something new, you have to get rid of something old. You have to make a choice in that there is only so much room. (Donna)

Possessions residing in Donna's place of being must be authentic, provide variety, meet her needs, and be important enough to take up valuable space on her vessel. If they do not meet these requirements they may be off-loaded. *Authentic* possessions are ones that are "masters or perpetrators" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 48), that is, they influence others with their original and genuine state of being, giving a sense of the real to their world. *Variety* among the possessions requires they have unique "differences and diversity" (p. 853), characteristics that enable a woman to put them to creative uses. Like the women who possess them, such genuine, yet singular, possessions find themselves welcome companions for expressing a woman's ways of being. Genuine, different women collect authentic, yet diverse stuff.

Considering items with such care before they are brought to the vessel redefines a life need. Sea women have come to know that one way to determine if an

item is needed is to consider if the label “clutter” fits its character. Possessions that fail to meet the criterion for being “needed” border on the other end of the spectrum as “clutter.” *Clutter* means “to form clots” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 134). To clutter a boat is to clot its being, a sluggish way to move through the place of “in-between.”

Cindy is surrounded by possessions in her art studio, where an organized sense of clutter permeates this creative space. She reflects on leaving things behind.

One of the biggest tensions and fears of leaving the dock to go cruising is not being able to “paint big.” I have to “paint big.” I do not know why; I can’t “paint little.” When I am cruising, I can paint little to sell paintings, but I will miss the big canvas...I will figure out a way to work large at sea. (Cindy)

Cindy’s tension with the land appears when she considers leaving the creation of “big” paintings behind to go on a full-time sea voyage. What is the significance of her fear of leaving this “big” way behind? Painting “big” since the age of 20, a mid-life Cindy seeks venues to show her strong visual statements, and, perhaps, therein lays her lived tension. When Cindy departs the land for sea, the space constraints of a boat silence her “big” voice, her calling. For Cindy, her art possessions are her means for communicating with the world. They are her voice, and their loss would mean silence. As they live their big stories, voyaging women of the sea live their “big” lives.

Big stuff. Living “big” generates big stories which, in turn, reveal the big stuff of life, meaning. To live big is to face the storm, rise to the crest of building waves, and view the transcended ways ahead. Only after experiencing the big way of being “up and out” (Small, 1995, p. 38) of the troughs, can we look back down at what we have (Small, 1995). “We are to take it all on fully. And dance our way

through life's experiences, both the joys and all the sorrows. And then, and only then, can we disidentify and rise up and out" (Small, 1995, p. 86). To disidentify with stuff, is to become unattached from the encumbering ways that prevent us from moving along in a big way.

Big living reveals our anchors to the past, hooks that keep women in life's troughs unable to rise to the next crest. Big living is reflected in our stuff, the trappings of life. Our stories or expressions reveal the meaning of our attachments, our past and present places. For many women, possessions express self and are needed for us to be known or understood. This explains the lure of the land, for it is on land where the availability of space allows a life and its collected possessions to be displayed for all to see. In Cindy's layered paintings, we learn to look beneath the surface of each possession to find the deeper meaning of the life it represents. This rediscovery of meaning shifts our perspective through a "transformation in mind" (Small, 1995, p. 7). We find that our stuff may hold deep meaning for us and the ways we come to know that meaning can shape the being within in a big way. Possessions remind us of who we are and what we cherish; they are vehicles that can reveal meaning.

A sailor's smaller dwelling area allows for fewer possessions, but quantity is not what matters here. Like collected possessions, we have come to know that the simple routines of daily life can also be collections of self-expression; they are her "life" possessions. Sailing women who seek the sea at mid-life consciously choose to evolve in a place that shapes them in unique ways. "Life" possessions are reflected in

her conscious undertakings; they compose a collection of gifts made up of her reconsidered and reinvented self, her big life (Small, 1995). It takes courage, love, and wisdom to interpret our life story, re-look at our selves, and take our life in new directions (Small, 1995). The stuff of big life living reminds us of the paths we have chosen.

Maxine Greene (as cited in Ayers & Miller, 1998) urges us “to look at things large” (p. 94) in order that we might see beyond fixed versions of ourselves and others and “see things as if they could be otherwise” (p. 93). The sailing women in my study heeded her call by not finalizing versions of their lives, but rather considering ways they could live and be in another way. In order to live large and to have a big life, Greene directs us to use our creative energies to reinvent how we interact in the world. It is only, then, that the possibilities of new beginnings and new interpretations of human ways present themselves. The women who choose another way of being in the world, a big life, bring forward new interpretations. Sailing women have come to know that a big life does not always mean having lots of stuff, but rather having a reconsidered way.

Sticky stuff. Retained for the memory of the person who gave it to her, Barney reminds me that possessions taken on a boat are chosen very carefully. In her case, they are usually family related. They are reflective warm remembrances of *beings far*. Barney considers the importance of possessions by the degree they adhere to her vessel’s being.

Those four little things over there (two tiny clay ducks and two small ceramic pots), are stuck down on the countertop. You can not pick them up. They are

put down on 'tacky adhesive.' I do not have to put them away when we sail. That "angel frog" over there is stuck down. My artificial narcissus bulbs are not stuck, but I could stick them down... That family plate is hung up on a wire with a complete circle of sticky stuff. It has not moved in waves or storms on the ocean. It is always just there. (Barney)

Barney's possessions are either stuck down permanently or can be removed out of sight in a sea way. Giving it an honorable status on the boat, putting "sticky adhesive" on something, keeps the item in her sight for all time. Those items affixed with *Velcro* or other temporary fasteners are removed and put away during times of chaos. The degree to which an object is needed during times of crisis finds a place of permanence and honor in Barney's residence. Items with "sticky adhesive" rank high on her scale of possessions that support her being at sea.

The "stickiness" of the possessions that reside within our vessels pulls remembered Others to us. The sense of the pulling awakens the wonder of the relation between the Others and the self. Harkening women who feel the pull experience moments of self-reconsideration as the remembered open our hearts and lay bare our vulnerability and longing for their presence. At the moment the pull on the "sticky adhesive" is felt, we remember we are both separated and connected in ways that chaotic oceans can not dislodge.

Pulling away from the familiar to be alone in the company of Others is an act of reconsideration that reveals a deeper understanding of what it means to separate. Levinas (1961/1969) believes the act of separation brings one to a feeling of being one with the world, a time during which all things are possible. Feeling "oneness," or serenity, occurs when all sides of our being, that which lives in the day to day as well

as that which resides in our inner self, are integrated. It is Donna's "Friday" feeling, or it is Levinas's (1961/1969) sense of "interiority" (p. 55), a lived state which, for however long it lasts, brings us to know ourselves as total beings. Serenity, or sustaining the self within the self, is a circular act of intentional living. To live intentionally requires us to see the tensions in our lives and to reshape our values as we are called forward into an ever changing world (Huebner, 1999). To pull away in solitude in order to hear the message of the call is an intentional act of becoming that draws us to Avalon's gates.

The Great Circle Route

A view of life as experienced in the lived way of sailing women is voiced in their descriptions of circular journeys to meaning. They experience circular thoughts that propel them to new depths of knowing. Through the continual witnessing of the "circle of life," Sal and Anne have come to know Nature's circular way of continuous rebirth and emergence. Barney considers the continual filling and emptying ways of relationships. Through a give and take relationship that perpetuates itself, people continually empty and refill each other's beings. It is as if the circular exchanges of conversation and being present to the Other brings them together, making them integral.

The muses know the ways of circular living. Linda and Dee see life as a path that comes full circle, as they have come to realize their need to return to a simpler, basic way of being, Donna has come to know life as a process of returning to previous places of being as she retraces the circular paths of her life. Gina lives the

circular way of time as the hands of her clocks go round and round, and every day is called Friday. As she sails around the globe, Gloria lives the circular path to freedom.

Circular ways and circular themes are the ways of mid-life cruising women. We know a circle to be a line without beginning or end. Thus, a circular way of being has no middle point; it has no mid-life. Circular ways only have a middle place and that is called itscenter. Just as *eccentric* cruising women on a sea voyage go around and around a “different center” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 230), women who journey purposefully through life go round and round their being’s center to a place we call Avalon.

“Round and Round”

All women of the world know,
Around and around our beings go.
Where we stop no body knows
Yet, around and around we always go.

All the women of the world know,
Spiraling through life is the way to go.
Back and forth we move along,
Two steps front, one step back--our sailing song.

All the women of the world know,
The more things stay the more they show.
My mirror reflects both grandma and daughter,
Alike yet so different from the other.

All women of the world know,
Around and around our beings go.
Where we stop no body knows
Yet, around and around we always go. (Schaefer, 2003)

Women who have come full circle on their mid-life journey may not know when they have reached the place of their beginning. Like Cindy’s view of the

horizon, it is familiar and, thus, overlooked as being a place of arrival “there.” Others experience the re-beginning of their circular path as a time of transformation when profound insights into their life are made. Still others do not see their life at mid-life as lacking anything at all and just allow themselves the freedom to enjoy the life as it is (Maloney, 1999). I question the existence of women having little or no interest in reconsidering their lives. Lindbergh (1955) also struggles with this possibility:

I thought, not all women are searching for a new pattern of living, or want a contemplative corner of their own. Many women are content with their lives as they are... With envy and admiration, I observe the porcelain perfection of their smoothly ticking days. Perhaps they had no problems or found the answers long ago...

But as I went on writing and simultaneously talking with other women, young and old, with different lives and experiences—those who supported themselves, those who wished careers, those who were hard-working housewives and mothers, and those with more ease—I found that my point of view was not unique. In varying settings and under different forms, I discovered that many women... were grappling with essentially the same questions as I, and were hungry to discuss and argue and hammer out possible answers. Even those whose lives had appeared to be ticking imperturbably under their smiling clock-faces were often trying, like me, to evolve another rhythm with more creative pauses in it, more adjustments to their individual needs, and new and more alive relationships to themselves as well as others... (Lindbergh, 1955, preface, para. 3-4)

Her haunting words echo what this work has brought me to know. Women have a common inherent need for reflection and sharing of their lived experiences in order to “evolve another rhythm” (Lindbergh, 1955, preface, para.4). Now enlightened, where do mid-life women go from here? Perhaps, we “ready about.”

“Ready about” is a call of the sea. It is voiced when a vessel is about to tack into the wind and change directions from the original track. This new track does not overlay onto the previous one, but rather cuts through the water in a new direction.

Another rounding of the same course, but on a different track, provides us with new opportunities to experience unexplored life lessons. These deeper levels of knowing can, however, reveal a confusing scene. It seems that some of what we seek has already been viewed on previous roundings of the track. Perhaps all the riches of the world are already right here by our feet (Modall, 1999) or have passed under the keels of our ships. Perhaps we need to reconsider our circular ways of being in the world in order to help us come to know what we already possess, enough love and wisdom to change the world (Small, 1995).

CHAPTER SIX: AROUND AND AROUND WE GO

Circular Ways of Being in the World

Westerly travel, “sun-ward” movement, is needed for proper harmony with Nature (Farrer, 1991). Making their circular passages toward the sun in harmony with Nature, sailors use the prevailing winds from the east to push their sailboats west. “Each body has its place according to its kind, and it strives toward that place...When a body moves toward its place, this motion accords with its nature...All motions against nature are violent” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1958, p. 94). To follow the true nature of our being is the way to harmonious living. By step marching in a uniform fashion on a predictable path that restricts their movement, and making motions that are oppressive and against their very essence, women fall into disharmony (Levin, 1985). Thus, the tendency of mid-life women to reconsider their paths and contemplate other more harmonious routes should come as no surprise. In this final chapter, then, I rely on the energy from a “circular passage” to help find new meaning in our metaphorical journey to Avalon and back.

Beings that travel a circular path in harmony with Nature follow their true nature. Heidegger (1962/1977) echoes the harmonious possibility of circular journeys:

In circular motion, the body has its place in the motion itself; for this reason such motion is perpetual and truly in being...The purest motion, in the sense of change of place, is circular motion; it contains, as it were its place in itself. A body that so moves itself moves itself completely. (Heidegger, 1962/1977, p. 261)

Van Gogh writes: “Life is probably round” (as cited in Bachelard, 1958, p. 232).

Bachelard (1958) agrees, “For when it is experienced from the inside, devoid of all exterior features, beings can not be otherwise than round” (p. 234). Our call to round ways, roundings, and round aboutness is essential to our lived landscape. “The round cry of round being makes the sky round like a copula, and in this rounded landscape, everything seems to be in repose. The round being propagates its roundness, together with the calm of all roundness” (Bachelard, 1958, p. 239). Rilke’s poem of an oak tree translated in Bachelard (1958) illustrates the meaning of living “round.”

One day it will see God
 And so, to be sure,
 It develops its being in roundness
 And holds our ripe arms to Him.

Tree that perhaps
 Thinks innerly
 Tree that dominates self
 Slowly giving itself
 The form that eliminates
 Hazards of wind! (Rilke, as cited in Bachelard, 1958, p. 240)

Round ways are not accidental. They are God-created motions that help us imagine the permanent places of our being. The pattern for circular living is available to us; we can see it everywhere in our world. Apache Indians construct their villages in a circle. They believe all life resides within a great circle that encloses the natural universe (Farrer, 1991).

The place within the circle is filled with overlapping thoughts; there, all kinds of behavior and thought patterns catch hold and influence each other. Like Cindy’s painted depictions of interacting engine shapes or our visual image of a flotilla of

ships, there are no separate or singular instances of behavior or thought among beings. In fact, when elements interact and cross over each other, a new state of being is formed called a “chiasma” (Farrer, 1991, p. 104).

A chiasma is a term used “when paired chromatids form the X shape in a portion of the meiotic prophase in the cellular equivalent of genetic crossing” (Farrer, 1991, p. 104). Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) calls the “in-between” place of being a “chiasm” (p. 130) or intertwining of the visible and the tangible. The chiasm is the cleavage, invisible, between-ness that is like a dream (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968). It is here the perception of our reality is born and our integration of meaning arises. Wherever a crossing or intersection occurs there is a chiasma, and the potential for creativity and reordering is enabled (Farrer, 1991). Revealing images of our past and present ways, in addition to images of what might be (Farrer, 1991), crossing-over places within the circle of life continually emerge. Whatever it is called: chasim, crossing-over spot, “in-between” place, or Avalon’s path, it is not the cause of change or creativity in our lives; it is only the facilitator. “Chiasma is potentiation, not ultimatum” (Farrer, 1991, p. 127). The Buddha calls it “enfolded order” (Soeng, 2000, p. 91) or the “endless mutual influence of things” (Mizuno, 1972, p. 139). Each experience or conscious seed is mixed with another in unimaginable ways to reemerge as a new reconfiguration of things (Soeng, 2000). The potential of our being lies within the circles we create.

Potential for powerful transformations of being lies within the circles of women. With a centered purpose for being, women gathered in a circle become

witnesses, role models, and soul connections for each other (Duerk, 1989). Providers of intangible spiritual and psychological support, validators of reality and possibility, circles of beings are mutual aid and learning societies; they are agents for change (Duerk).

Each woman in this study was in her middle years, a chronological measure on a circular timeline somewhere between a known beginning and an unknown end. If the end is not yet known, how do we name the mid-point of someone's life? Perhaps the place called mid-life can be named using Donna's measure, cruising time. Using lived moments rather than minutes, the mid-life clock measures our mid-life place by experiences. Its hands point to experienced events with momentous, momentary momentum. Now, when mid-life women ask "What time is it?", we knowing muses respond, "It is time to experience the time of your life. Yes, indeed!"

Traveling a Circular Path

In the course of my study I have come to know that the extraordinary ways of sailors' lives amplify lived experiences for phenomenological viewing. The sailing muses' songs, played through a phenomenological amplifier, have enabled me to bring into focus the hidden meanings that exist in the white space between conversation's words and question marks. As life themes surfaced for reconsideration, we unearthed the deeper meaning of being in the world that had been forgotten, "trained out" of us. Our work took us on a circular path around and around old ways and gave us a new view. We came to remember that each and every act, of each and every day, in each and every life is composed of meaning-filled experiences.

Having been unwrapped and laid bare, our languaged meanings become our gifts to the world.

Our coming to know the meaning of transitional journeys and voyages in the place of “in-between” requires the help of Others. Enlightened by the gift of meaning, it is now our turn to show, share, and give back what we have come to know to any and all who hearken to our call. Words curve and form themselves around the descriptions of what we have learned on this circular sea voyage, yet we struggle to articulate their meaning. Our voices sing loudly as we chorus the lived way of being at sea, but some of us stumble on the words and look to wise Others to build upon or finish our thoughts. We wait for their wisdom to fill in our blanks, and then together in a circle, we herald our message.

Some women who journey seek nothing at all; others seek confirmation of what already is known to them, and still others of us yearn to find the missing link in our incomplete lives. Because this research reveals “common” knowledge, as well as knowledge that is completely new, it can benefit both enlightened ones and seekers. Looking for a means to express that which is not seen or hidden from view, we pause at the circle’s mid-point “stopping-off” place, a place of circular coming together, to express the common-hood of women’s uncommon ways. Upon occasion, our camaraderie leads to acts of mutual comforting, and we ask each other “What ails thee?” (Bolen, 1994, p. 39). Our answers reveal similar themes that voice our common purpose; we differ only in how we choose to address our pains, hungers, and unsatisfied desires.

The journey to Avalon awaits those who seek to ponder their lives for deeper meaning. The metaphorical search for Avalon, *The Isle of Glass* is a maiden's search for a mysterious "there," the place where her new, profound, and transcended ways of being in the world are realized.

Avalon attained is not the goal of a journey that has no end, no conclusion, no answer, and no physical place called "there." To focus on the end is to miss the point of the journey. It is the experience of the journey in route that reveals the meaning of a woman's lived life. The search for Avalon is a circular process of re-beginnings for women seeking the "...attainment and cherishing of unitive experience" (DiSanto & Steele, 1990, p. 29). Journeying together in a circle, women come to know that their passage through phases of life consists of a series of reunions and detachments with Others. They unite with self, family, friends, possessions and place; and they detach from self, families, friends, possessions, places, and ideas. They detach from reunions, and detach from detachment (DiSanto & Steele, 1990), and freed from their shackles, they float away.

This research has revealed to us that most women float in a questioning state of being, in a place of experiencing that does not require necessarily the watery world of the sea. Seeking invisible ways already known, but forgotten, does not require the sight or touch of water. The search merely requires "...a circular route around the same repetitions..." (O'Donohue, 1999, p. 46). Long since buried in everyday chaos, the invisible treasures of life await our revisiting in everyday places. Women seek a treasure, a way of being and knowing, that they already possess.

I've wondered why it took us so long to catch on. We saw it and yet we didn't see it or rather we were trained not to see it...The truth knocks on the door and you say, "Go away, I'm looking for the truth," and so it goes away. Puzzling. (Pirsig, 1979, p. 13)

Hearing the voice of everyday ways is like listening to the sounds of summer cicadas, "...the pervasive presence of what man [sic] is ultimately after" (DiSanto & Steele, 1990, p. 30). That is to say, the sound (that which we seek) is all around us, but we never really hear it. From the mouth of the Other, whom we fail to see, comes the voice of God articulating the meaning of life. Unknowingly, as they partake in and share with Other's everyday experiences, most mid-life women already have glimpsed Avalon. They do not realize, however, they have been "there" because they have been trained to overlook the importance of "common" sharing. Thus, in what seems to be an endless circular search for meaning, they continue to seek "it" out. It is as if their vessels, whose holds are filled with gifts for the world, are going around and around in circles.

Vessels of being. When circling sea beings empty the stored gifts from their holds, their vessels float higher in the water. Women are vessels of being; their centered bodies, like the hulls of ships, are useful because of the potential empty centered space within. "The sea is parted by what is, but the ship is floated by what is not. Because of what is not, what is, is made useful" (Grigg, 1990, p. 39). In our empty centered state, we carry. Women carry their stores of life, their gifts, as they travel their circular path.

In Carpeneto's (1996) metaphor, the vessel of life is a chalice that carries our gifts. The beliefs of the Catholic faith reveal the power of a vessel that holds broken

fragments of bread and spent wine. They "...bring wholeness and healing by virtue of their very brokenness" (Carpeneto, p. 234). Our experiences of brokenness, woundedness, sorrow, love, and joy are all gifts to share. As we give the gift of these knowing ways, our vessels empty. Causing us to rise up, floated by what we no longer carry, our stores become depleted and our possessions wear out. The journey, then, is a process of unloading until our vessels are empty and our holds are filled with transcending nothingness. We become floating hulls and empty chalices; life is about becoming empty.

Through the metaphor of the raft, Soeng (2000) deepens this understanding. Rafts are like our vessels that we use to cross the rivers that circle our world, the world of "in-between" places. He suggests, once they have been used to get us "there," we must leave the rafts for others, as we no longer need to take them along. The rafts represent the teachings we have come to know on our journey to reach a higher level of being. Once these teachings are no longer needed and we are "there," each must abandon the vessel and leave it behind as a thing in itself. To experience renewal, we must empty out, share, and leave behind our vessels, our knowing ways.

The circular mid-life passage requires a prepared, sturdy vessel in order to venture through the difficult currents of transitional seas. Periodically, the vessel's seams and decks must be recaulked. The woman sailor pauses and "stops over" to repair and shine tired surfaces. Because most sailors are "do-it-your-selfers," generally, she will do the work herself. "The healing occurs within the woman herself as she begins to nurture her body and soul and reclaim her feelings, intuition,

sexuality, and humor” (Murdock, 1990, p. 8). At times she asks for help and turns to the loving hands of patient Others to ready her for the voyage of a lifetime. Using all manner of means, the vessel of being becomes ready to begin a voyage of circular ways through mid-life waters.

Menopause marks the crossing-over time of an aging woman’s vessel.

Menopause is defined as the “change of life” (Grambs, 1989, p. 43). I reflect on the chaos of our circular seas and wonder aloud, “When is a woman’s life not changing?” *Menopause* is a lived time, a “month pause” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 470), a “stopping-off” place, when women replenish their inner stores.

A woman is born with all of the ova she will have during her life span; some undeveloped ova may remain after menopause, though they are no longer released. Other physiological changes also occur. The uterus begins to atrophy and becomes very small since it will no longer be needed. The vaginal and urogenital lining becomes thin, vaginal secretions diminish, and vaginal muscles shorten and become less flexible. (Grambs, p. 47)

The physical look of menopause has a shrinking, dry appearance like the small, waterless space inside a ship’s hull. When reconsidered with a phenomenological eye, the lived body of a menopausal woman becomes a cozy, dry hold that houses her being. Her hot flashes create an endless source of heat to warm the vessel’s interior. A mid-life vessel which has been fortified by the passage of time, pampered with loving hands, and filled with gifts is ready to begin a circular journey on the world of oceans.

The stores we carry. “We can only keep what we remember” (Farrer, 1991, p. 9). Voyaging women ready their centered holds to keep their compelling, significant rememberings and knowing ways--their gifts. Due to their vessels’ limited

space, the memories carefully choose them. The sea way has helped them come to know which remembered ways will support the vessel during the turbulent mid-life passage. When the memories are recalled and shared, the vessels empty. Soeng (2000) teaches that emptiness yields awakening and the decrease of human suffering. To empty out through sharing stories is to ease the human condition.

Like the ark of Noah, in the Biblical story, each of us is constructed and our centers are filled in accordance with the Way. Along with his family, the creatures of earth were loaded two by two onto Noah's ark. Then, God brought the rain for 40 days and nights, killing all that remained on the earth. When the rains subsided, only Noah and those within the ark survived. He alighted with his fellow travelers to repopulate the earth (Roche, 1990). We have come to know our vessels as arks, constructed and filled in accordance with the power of our lived bodies. Carefully filling our centered selves with our remembered ways, we become a force capable of repopulating the world. Selection of beings in a "two by two" fashion symbolize that the Others who accompany us will find a place on board. As Others *align* with us, meaning "to copulate" (Barnhart, 1995, p. 18), we are assured the legacy of our beginnings and the continuance of humankind. Our journey reconsidered becomes a joining, a circular path to our center, a crusade to restore the very life of the planet.

The Circle's Center

"Mid-lifers" seek knowledge about the circle's end, the yet to be known, the great abyss--death itself The muses have seen this place of half -empty, nothingness, and "going to." It is the reason they prepare their vessels, for it is the compelling

force that balances with their current place of beginning. The Buddha teaches that to be in the “middle way” (Soeng, 2000, p. 18) is to be in the center where one uncovers a “vibrant intellectual and emotional discovery that sustains one’s endeavors” (Soeng, p. 118). It is the resting place amongst the “suchness” (Soeng, p. 118) of things where we transcend false perceptions, all perceptions, to rest in things just as they are. Nirvana is found there (Soeng).

Mid-life lies in the center of a changing life that is coming into balance. For some, it is considered a time of crisis which, according to Chinese tradition, can be considered either a time of danger or opportunity (Soeng, 2000). Upon which end of mid-life’s fulcrum does our being reside? Perhaps we can reconsider a “mid-life crisis” as being an event that helps us find the center of balance for the loads we carry. It is the time of life when we learn to attend to our burdens and look for their “secret structures” (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 156), their point of equilibrium. “Balance is a question of centering...Being well-centered we can encounter other beings in a more relaxed, open, receptive way...then it is easier to release them from the structural field constituted by our anxiety: we can begin to let beings be” (Levin, 1985, p. 274). Crisis comes into balance as we come to our centers of being.

A sailor’s center. All circles of beings have a center. Circular gathering is mutual (Duerk, 1989), for it equalizes the status of the participants; no one person is singled out as more equal than the next. Circles of beings may gather around a cooking hearth or a sacred fire. Quilting circles gather around an empty middle space as women share stories and craft their creative expressions. Sailors gather in each

other's cockpits around a compass located in the cockpit's center, usually mounted on a raised pillar-like object called a binnacle. Sea people come together around this centered place at sunset to share the stories of the day, provide mutual support, and give aid to each other. At times the gatherings are boisterous as members "shout out" the roar of the day. They also can be quiet and somber times when more serious topics are addressed, such as, threatening weather, broken equipment, family matters, crew illness, or any topic that supports the voyages ahead. Circular gatherings have no agenda except the mutual need to come to the center (Bolen, 1999). The ship's compass is a sailor's centering place, and it symbolizes directional guidance provided by the sailing circle.

The sailing muses have come to know the circular meaning of life: a simple, primary way that is both complex and technical; friends held both near and far; measured time that is not measurable; controlled time that is out of our control; expansive freedom in confined, small places; blessed solitude in the company of others; and a love of Nature like She is family. These descriptions of meaning are circular and confusing to our "everyday" ears. To assist ourselves and Others in coming to know the meaning of life, we seek out ways to clarify the essence of the calls. What good is finding the way around if no one comes with you? Realizing the energized, centrifugal tension from our focused attention and intention (Soeng, 2000), we burst open a way to meaning. Struggling for language to capture the essence of their storied lives, the muses call out their feelings, notions, ideas, or flashes of insight and hang them upon the conceptual markers of this work. In frustration with

the shortcomings of language to express the ineffable, we end our conversations with a hug, a knowing smile, a silent nod, and a collective voicing of, “Yes, that is it!” Together with hands joined we have arrived “there.” We have reached the center of the sailor’s circle.

The way “there” is realized by balancing the whole and finding the circle’s center, and to do that, women must attempt to understand the collective way of things, the Tao (Grigg, 1990). The Taoist way of life is a sailing way of life where “...things seem to happen with an ease that is natural and timely...like a sailboat moving upon the sea. Even in the winds of adversity an inner balance steadies the heeling ship...” (Grigg, 1990, p. xvi). A sailboat heels to port or starboard as it seeks its center of balance; it seeks centeredness for there is the place of the smoothest ride. The circle’s center is the middle point of our journey’s circle, and from there our being sees 360 degrees around; from the center, we see it all. As we come to meaning, women come to know the power of their centers.

Coming to my center. As a place of rhythm and circular motion, the center mirrors the essence of life itself. We reconsider our bodies as structures in motion composed of protons and neutrons spinning around an atom’s empty nucleus (Soeng, 2000); our bodies are formed motion, dwelling places without solidarity. I have discovered the place that holds my own circular motion and centering. Housing the emptiness of my pure circulating energy, I have found peace within the hull of my boat.

Circular language defines the being's center, a place that houses gifts of compassion and caring. Yielding views of new experiences (Levin, 1985), our center becomes a place of rest that opens to a transcended space. I have come to know that my space for centering is my sailboat. It is here that I find inner peace which enables me to give voice to the woman within. I moved on board my boat on April, 2, 2003, and ever since I have been using this place of centering to connect with my core and write my way to meaning. It is here that the work of this research is taking place. It is here I voice the meaning of the lived experience of mid-life women living on board sailboats. It is here in this centering place that I live the experience named in my research.

This centering place is energized, "moved and motivated by positive and negative emotions, habitual patterns of attraction, aversion, and indifference that determine the character and course of all our motility and activity" (D. Levin, 1985, p. 337). It was here that I came to my center and reversed my direction; it is the place of my path's turning point. The center leads us to new ways of dwelling in place, a personal transformation that becomes our gift to the world. From this inspired place I began to formulate the words that would become my gift to the world.

Each day at sunrise my husband, Tom, leaves the boat and goes to land for his five mile run. Leaving me to my writing, he stays away on shore and occupies himself with a newspaper and a cup of coffee. It is during these hours of solitude that I am able to reflect on the lived experiences of the day and put to language the

meanings that surface. It is this journaling that gives voice to the lived experience of women who choose the sea way.

Following the first two months of writing on board the boat, I began to share the contents of the research with interested others. I started by sharing it with my sailing muses who affirmed my written worlds with a knowing smile and nod. Yes, we had captured their experience just right! As an invited speaker at a national convention of sailors who were curious why their lived ways were worthy of doctoral research, I shared some of what I had come to know. Their response to the revealed meanings was one of satisfaction and pride in knowing that their chosen life was indeed special and meaning filled. They, too, reacted with a sea of smiles and nods of agreement. Inspired by their energy, I knew I was on the right path. My writing would continue in my nautical place of centering for the next four months.

Life is a circular dance of beings around their centers. To live in a centered way is to delineate, clear, and prepare a location where the "...human body comes into its own and finds its place as a body of ontological understanding" (D. Levin, 1985, p. 334). I have found my center in my centering place, and it is within this vessel that I will continue to journey. As a being in motion, I move in all directions, but my compass ultimately takes me forward.

Crossing Our Outbound Track

Around and around we go, and with each completed circle our vessels veer slightly off the path, crossing our outbound track. At the crossing-over place, we consider our inevitable end; we glimpse all we have done and all that is yet possible.

There, we choose to continue the journey or to stop, returning to more familiar and easier ways. Will we consider Donna's idea of living a half-land and half-sea life? Will we enter the half-empty side of Barney's world and fill it up on the next "go round?" I hear my mother calling me back, "It is time to come home now, Barbara; enough is enough." But, we mid-life sailors have come to know that enough is never enough, for we are on a perpetual journey of continual replenishing. So, instead of going home we cross over our outbound track and ask, "What is next?" Our response is a grin and shrug because we still are unable to voice the ineffable answer. All we have come to know is that women go around and around their centers on a perpetual journey of becoming of which there is no end, and with hands extended, they reach for and grab onto others who want to come along.

I used to be a practicing nurse and a weekend sailor. Now, sailing full time, I have come to see myself as a journeying mid-life woman living my day-to-day life as a perpetual opportunity for enlightenment. I have come to know myself to be a heeling, healing being with a hearkening call, sailing "in-between" the places of "coming from" and "going to," on a journey that crosses my outbound track taking me on another rounding.

Life is a spiraling affair of round and round, crossing over, looking sideways, going forward, and going backward. Rogers (1970) depicts it as a *Slinky* toy, and calls the phenomenon "helicy" (p. 100), a component of the Rogerian Theory of Unitary Man (Rodgers, 1970). Helicy is a way of being in the world where "Life evolves along a spiraling longitudinal axis bound in the curvature of space-time. With

each turn of the spiral along the axis, similarities appear. Spirals along the axis are further embedded within the spiraling of the axis itself” (p. 100). Spiraling through life, we forever change as we forever remain the same. We have a mind of our own with our mother’s way about us. We see the world differently but through our father’s eyes. We are our own person, yet, we are all in this together. Eventually, we come to know and accept who we are, singing the song of the well known sailor, Popeye, “I am what I am, and that’s all that I am. I am Popeye, the sailor man [sic].” Knowing who we are and being all we are brings women to the place of transformation, a place of no return.

As you wait to cross the line of time
when everything reverses,
the faces of sister, of parent
and brother, of child at every age
ripple across the water. You reach
to touch the years you have missed
and everyone, even you,
disappears. (Zale, as cited in Henry, 2003, p. xiv)

In the course of our around and around journey, we come to know that we pass through our familiar starting places, and upon our returning, we realize that we are in a completely different frame of mind. More centered in our own being, we feel as if we have come full circle. Our intuitive self tells us we are transformed, and as we spiral forward, the place of our starting becomes the place of our next beginning.

Coming Full Circle

The dailyness of ordinary life is the birthplace of life’s circular purpose and meaning. The mysterious, “ordinary” ways of being are common mysteries that pervade everything (Grigg, 1990). “Beyond words and thoughts and understanding,

all wonder is the same wonder, all awe is the same awe” (Grigg, 1990, p. 123). Illuminated by these words of wisdom, we have come to know that it is no longer necessary to climb mountains, circumnavigate the globe, or fly an airplane to find ourselves and come to know the meaning of life. “The man [sic] who can see a miracle in a poem, who can take pure joy from music, who can break bread with comrades, opens his window to the same refreshing wind off the sea. He too learns a language of men” (Noddings, 1993, p. 239).

Nirvana is found in the blowing wind of every day life. Nirvana means “a condition of being blown out” (Mizuno, 1972, p. 132). As the wind blows us out and moves us along, sailors, at times, feel it go right through them. Our very essence of non-self is blown out, for the wind “will get into corners of experiences that will escape the settled, fixed person” (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 47). Vessels blown by wind, we glimpse the place of our becoming.

The common everyday is the “stuff” of our spiritual awakening. The “simplest” act, thought, or idea opens wide and converts eager listeners to the intuitive wisdom of the sacred, circular ways learned in the Church of Daily Life. In the Church of Daily Life, we “...see [view] all the fleeting world:

A star dawn, a bubble in the stream.
A flash of lightening in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream. (Soeng, 2000, p. 62)

Newly converted to this spiritual path, we are less cynical, skeptical and critical of Others; we hear the voice of God from every mouth. How do we live in a “never forgetting” way so not to lose sight of this circular illumination? We can use our day-

to-day experiences in the Church of Daily Life to remind us that everything and everyone we experience provide us with opportunities for enlightenment. My embodiment in the thematic world helps me redesign myself; my being in the world changes how I am in the world (Leder, 1990). In fact, the very turning of the world itself is re-envisioned as a giant prayer wheel, waiting for my spin.

Prayer wheels around. Visions of women going around and around invoke images of giant Tibetan prayer wheels. It is believed the wheels' spinning and mesmerizing ways heal those who participate in their "circling," but, more importantly, the spinning heals others; it is believed, in fact, their circular powers can heal the entire world. The healing force of the wheel lies in the rotation of the drum that houses a written prayer. Each rotation of the drum equates to saying the prayer out loud, thus invoking the powerful benevolent attention and blessings of Chenrezig, "...the embodiment of compassion...the awakened nature of each being's own mind, the love and compassion primordially present...inherent in our true nature" (The Prayer Wheel, 2003).

Women, standing on a hillside, peering,
 Peering into blue space...
 ...what will woman be?
 ...not yet fully seen
 ...not yet fully revealed
 ...but coming
 ...coming
 ...what will woman be? (Duerk, 1989, pp. 114-115)

As they go through daily life, mid-life women spin likedrums of being around their centers. Awakening Chenrezig, their true nature's compassion, each circling becomes a prayer. Like the dance of the whirling dervish, the spinning unleashes the

ecstasy in each woman that leads to her soul's bliss (Beresky, 1990). Discovering the power within, enlightened women send their inherent compassion to the world.

Mandalas around. Mandalas are circular wheeling images found in daily life. They, too, serve as reminders for keeping us in this enlightened way. Used as “life rings,” the power of mandalas for bringing drifting beings back to a centered, circular life is revealed in Jung's (1973) research. Mandalas are “circular images which are drawn, painted, modeled, or danced” (Jung, p. 3). The depicted spheres that symbolize the individuation and the wholeness of human beings are “...cryptograms...in which I saw the self--that is, my whole being--actively at work” (Jung, p. v). The mandala is an instrument of contemplation (Jung). The *yantra* styled mandala is drawn using three circles that are arranged to signify sacred seclusion and concentration. The goal of the contemplation of circular images is to bring the observer from the illusion of self as an “...individual existence into the universal totality of the divine state” (Jung, p. 73).

Carpeneto (1996) expresses the meaning revealed through mandalas as she compares their illuminating properties to the meanings revealed by mid-life women as they journey through a labyrinth.

The labyrinth is merely a three-dimensional mandala we may walk into in time and space. But, we may also carry it in our hearts, gazing on it as we will, remembering Jung's insights--every time we see our mandala, gaze upon our labyrinth, open ourselves up to what gifts these symbols give us, we are on the path to individuation. (p. 274)

She has come to know mandalas as a circular way to journey to our centers, the place of our treasures and gifts that we have carried with us all along. She helps us come to

know how life rendered in circular patterns and pictures can serve as daily reminders of the journey to our core.

Women journey in a flotilla, circum-rounding the planet on a circular journey to meaning. On the way they encounter fog banks that disorient them, yet ultimately bring them to new levels of awareness. Like the mists surrounding the isle of Avalon, fog banks are passing-through places, places for illumination, places where we feel completely turned around.

Completely Turned Around

On July 1, 2003 I set out on a “shake-down” cruise. Accompanied by my husband we sailed from Annapolis to Nova Scotia on our 42 foot sailboat. A “shake down” cruise is a phrase which describes a sailing voyage meant to assess a vessel’s and crew’s readiness to handle more challenging future journeys. Areas for improvement are then addressed upon the boat’s return to port. During the voyage, I wrote the concluding pages of my research, the ones that voiced the meanings uncovered after my having lived the experience, myself, of the sea way.

Informed by the knowing ways of my muses, I was not making this journey alone. They were with me, and their wise words accompanied me through each phase of this “shake down.” I remember thinking to myself how comforting it was to have their voices with me to advise me on the yet to be experienced ways of being in the sea world. I set sail to experience the rebirth foretold by the wise women in my writings. My daily journal’s chronological rendering of my day-to-day experiences conveys the ways their songs brought me to the meaning of this lived way.

During the course of my writing, I referred to my earlier words and reflected on my previously recorded thoughts. I was greeted with a voice I did not recognize. I asked myself, “Did I write that? Where did this meaning-filled uncovering come from?” It felt as though I were hearing the voice of a wise woman who was becoming my new best friend. For the very first time I hearken to her call and hear the wisdom of my own words speaking back to me. Behold, my very “best-est” friend, my pal, is myself, a woman who has been silent for over fifty years.

The women of my research, my muses, also greeted me from my written pages. Their comforting words were applicable to the daily dilemmas and activities I experienced at sea. Coupled with the newly found voice of my centered self, we were linked together in voice and soul as we sailed the uncharted waters of my mid-life experience.

To shake something is to put it in motion. Buddhist teachings remind us we are already beings in motion (Soeng, 2000). Our bodies resonate with the motion of neutrons and protons moving in circular orbits around the atoms of our makeup. The interactive movement of a crew on a ship during a “shake down” cruise causes reconnections and new connections to be experienced. It was from this shaking up way of being that my new life emerged .

My Lived Sea Way

This voyage has shaken me down and shaken me up. I have been altered through the experience of my new life’s daily lessons. All through my journey, the songs of my muses sang to me. Their melodious tones comforted and reminded me of

the sisterhood of this uncommon way. My writings of the last six months reflect the musings of a renewed, mid-life sailing woman who has come to a new level of enlightenment.

“I Am Renewed”

I think phenomenologically not technically.
 I imagine rather than see.
 I reflect rather than think.
 I am illuminated rather than educated.
 I move through things rather than around them.
 I journey rather than move along.

I am renewed.
 I am open rather than ready.
 I am open to pain so I can feel it.
 I am open to joy so I can feel it to my core.
 I am timely rather than on time.
 I venture rather than go.
 I relate rather than meet.

I am renewed.
 I let thoughts go rather than forget them.
 I swallow tension into my center.
 I burn brightly rather than burn out.
 I feel supported rather than tethered.
 I feel challenged rather than stopped.
 I eat snacks rather than meals.
 I float rather than swim.
 I live life rather than life living me.
 I am an embodied phenomenon, let's talk. (Schaefer, 2003)

On the following pages an accounting of the lived experience of this mid-life sailing woman builds upon the knowing ways of my nine sailing women. Together we join in the circle of mid-life to give voice to potential meaning of this lived journey for all women.

Living with Nature. I wept the day I moved on board the boat. Tears welled up from the being within who was overcome with the magnitude of what was to come. I was happy, sad, scared and fearful, for already my transformation had begun. My tears mingled with the water of the ocean as I joined with the earth's many sorrows. Sister Ocean comforted my vessel's being that night with Her rocking motion. Cradling a newly born infant, she rocked me to sleep. Anne's and Sal's voices came as reminders that this was a newly found kinship with Nature. Surrounded by her sky above, her water below, and the wind around me, I indeed feel like I was being embraced by living, loving family. This relationship was further opened up with Abram's (1996) words, describing Nature's wind as the breath that rushes into our lungs and becomes "part of the physical being" (p. 227). The bond created between us brought me to a new level of respect for Nature's air, land and water. She is family, after all, and I need her safe and healthy in order for me to live this new way.

Perfect strangers The day of our departure, I waved good-bye to Sharon, a woman I met for the first time that morning on my boat's dock. We spoke all of 10 minutes, and during that time, I told her my entire family and sailing history. This "perfect" stranger and her open welcoming ways made her a fast friend, or as Donna would call her, a friend "near." Her smile and understanding nod eased my concerns about my impending journey. I do not recall her words to me, only the open support she offered. With a wave and a call of "Good journey," it was a "perfect" stranger,

not someone “near,” who sent me on my way. Indeed it was as Donna said; beings “far” would be there to show me the sea way.

Cindy’s musing about the give and take way of “what goes around comes around” was experienced in the gift given me by Joyce, a cruiser I later met in the port of Shelbourne, Nova Scotia. Having just received news about a sick family member back “home,” I shared with her my worries and concerns about being so far away from loved ones. She knew that cruising women who are without the accustomed support of family and old friends must help and support each other on the sea way. She invited me to dinner, gave me her favorite book to read, and smiled her advice with a rendering of Donna’s song, “If you can’t love the one you want, Barbara, love the one you are with.” She showed me the way of “perfect” strangers. Next time it will be my turn to fix the dinner, share a book, and send out the call of support.

“Perfect” strangers appear from out of nowhere. While I was sitting in the cockpit of my boat at a dock in Lockeport, Nova Scotia, a man dressed in fishing garb, complete with big black rubber boots, came into my view and looked at me face-to-face. I was reminded by the words of Levinas (1961/1969), that a full frontal eye-to-eye meeting with another brings one to call self into question. Thus informed, I felt encouraged to reconsider my ways of relating to strangers. The 25-year-old man was called “bootman” by the sailing community. Wandering the streets of Lockeport, he was alone but did not appear to be lonely. Resting his gaze upon mine, he waited for a response from me. In “normal” circumstances I would have looked away, but I

decided instead to extend a greeting. He began the conversation with a question, “I have a new pair of boots; they are black; they are size nine; they have a heel that is four inches tall; they have a wool liner, and they cost me 30 dollars. Do you have boots?” Taken aback by his simple direct question on a topic that seemed rather obscure, I reconsidered “bootman’s” way of being in the world. In Annapolis I would have called him developmentally marginal, but in my new way of thinking, I rethought that summation. I remembered the words of Epstein (2001) and Ackerman (1999) who spoke of the way beings live in the moment. Unafraid of his strange conversation, I responded to my new acquaintance and told him my boots were blue. He smiled and repeated the entire “boot” question again. His telling and retelling was not a story as we know it with a beginning, middle, and end. His was a story as he knew it, told only in the present tense, the “now” time of immediate “in the moment” living.

I reconsidered the meaning of being in the moment with another. This man had looked me in the eye with a gaze that never faltered, and he began to relate to me face-to-face. I came to know that words were not critical for communication to occur. This “perfect” stranger, now my friend “near,” knew the way to mutual recognition, and he showed me how to get it with an unashamed look. He was not distracted by the day-to-day (Heidegger, 1953/1996) of our busy, harried lives. He, instead, focused on the present audience, me. Being with him I came to know the delight of being totally listened to and sought out as the main focus of true human exchange.

Realizing freedom. We transited the Delaware Bay under sail. The wind was brisk as the boat did “hull speed,” the fastest speed it was capable of moving, eight knots (approximately seven miles per hour). I hear Gloria’s and Gina’s elated calls about realizing total freedom at sea. Gloria once voiced, “Sailing is not what Black Zimbabwean girls usually do.” Her remembered words formed my new call, “Sailing is not what White girls with successful careers, good incomes, and nice houses usually do.” Facing the wind, I stood in the cockpit’s centering place and a sense of release and total freedom ensued. It was Gloria’s total sense of freedom that I felt. Her escape from an oppressive patriarchal rule in Africa inspired me to leave my patriarchal day-to-day ways behind.

Freedom’s meaning also was realized as I reflected on my separation from cherished land possessions. I came to realize I did not miss them so much, a feeling that may change in time. At the suggestion of all the muses, however, I did take a few favorite things into my boat. Small’s (1995) voice echoed this sentiment as she reminded me of the significance of kept possessions. Her words recalled said that chosen life possessions from my old life were my newly formed collection of gifts to my reconsidered self. The possessions that found their way into my “big” (Small, 1995, p. 310) life would remind me continually of the path I have chosen. Barney’s voice called to me, too, to say that my chosen items connected me to the meaning of the life I left behind. I came to remember their words as I reflected upon on the meaning of the items I brought along on the journey.

A pillow bought in Annapolis shows the picture of an angel blowing a sailboat out to sea. I am again reminded of the words of Abram (1996) as he reflects on the wind, Nature's breath that rushes into our very being and propels us on our way. A carved statue of a Hindu elephant god adorns a shelf. It was purchased by me in Mysore, India. It represents the inland, landlocked places I leave behind. A piece of hand-woven Malian cloth is draped on a table. In Mali this cloth was given to new brides as a wedding gift. It reminds me that this is a new beginning for both me and my husband. Its place on board echoes the calls of Mary and Miki, the women named in Chapter One, who created a special space on their boats "for just the two of us," themselves and their husbands. A nautilus shell graces the top of my pantry, a reminder of Lindberg's (1955) words that so eloquently depict women's lives through the twists and turns of a spiraling shell. Finally, a large cowry shell with the Lord's Prayer engraved on its smooth back, sits in a place of honor in the center of the galley countertop. It reminds me of my forgotten spiritual self, now emerging through my lived experience at sea.

Loving the tension. As our Atlantic Ocean passage to Nova Scotia began, I was the first to take the night watch. I paused from my navigational duties and considered my situation. I smile pleased with the choice I had made of going to sea. As the sea's unpleasant motion begins to make me physically unsettled, heralding the tensions ahead, I am reminded by my "sister," Nature, that this newly realized life will have its ups and downs.

One night while on watch, I had to decide if I should venture further out to sea to catch a favorable wind, or switch on the engine and motor toward our next land fall. Using an engine to power across the sea is a contrary way to the natural motion of a sailboat. It is noisy and the boat's motion becomes jerky and harsh. Palmer (2000) has helped us come to know that to go against one's nature can cause harm to self and others. The tension mounts as I try to decide what to do. I cleared my thoughts and centered myself, what would my muses say if they were here? What words of wisdom can I derive from Palmer's (2000) work? I hear Gina's voice telling me to "go and do what you want."

I used the tension's energy to focus upon and reconsider my approach to the next leg of the voyage. The tension stirs me to reconsider new options, and rather than motor back to land, as I would have in my past, I turned the boat off the wind and sailed out to sea. I said to myself, "You are a sailor now, Barbara, you are no longer tied to the old ways." Thoughts and moments like these reveal my rebirthing. I pulled away from past patterns to sail a refocused way of being in the world. Donna's call echoes my choice, "Everyday is Friday, Barbara, what is the rush to get to land?"

Tensions created from having to choose a way to motion brought me to a point of reconsideration. I came to know I no longer had to fall into habitual ways of movement, but I also knew I needed the foundations of my past technical ways in order to move at all. I remembered Cindy's words about being "in-between," the chiasma (Farrer, 1991, p. 104), the place where past and present ways of knowing clash and reform. Tension brought me to a place of wholeness as it united these

forces. It helped me come to know that in life there are no right or wrong answers to the question, “What should I do?” Our actions, our motions, our movement answer that question and sing out our response. Responses reconsidered as acts birthed in the tensions of being can no longer be considered right or wrong, for tensions are what beings are. Tensions reveal our gifts, our conscious ways of being in the world, reflections of the being within.

Remembering Others. We lay at anchor after a long hard day at sea. The weather had been rainy, foggy and cold and we were underway for twelve hours. My mind wandered to thoughts of my pet dog, Dick, who died just before we moved on board. As Barney predicted, reflecting on past others helps ease the difficulties of the day. I followed her advice and used her bon voyage gift of adhesive glue to affix important memories to my vessel. My dog’s name, “Dick,” was glued to the side of my dingy and his picture permanently placed on my life raft’s abandon ship bag. With Barney’s help I came to know that the happy memories of past other’s love and support are there to help me get through difficult times at sea.

We are delayed in arriving at our landfall in Nova Scotia. Calls come to me from concerned family and friends; they wanted to know where we were, if we were safe. At first their concerns felt like the pull of the land. I resented their calling; it felt like I was being absorbed into someone else’s unfounded fears. Then, I remembered Donna’s words about the impact of separation on others left behind. I also considered Levinas’s (1961/1969) thoughts about how the experience of being separated from the Other shapes my sense of self. I reconsidered my response to the calls and came

to realize them as calls of support. I saw myself as an important being that Others wanted safely tethered to them. Their future calling became my vessel's lifelines, protecting me and preventing my total absence from their lives. This reconsidered way of thinking helped me feel their love. I used that new way of thinking to reconsider the pull of the Other, the pull of the land.

Solitude in the company of others. Our arrival in the harbor at Cuttyhunk, Rhode Island illuminated the solitary life of cruisers who live in close quarters with others. The anchorage was filled with over fifty boats existing in close proximity. We watched as other boats came into the harbor looking for a place to escape the storm. We helped the new-comers find places to set their anchors. Some vessels tied the new-comers to their hull's side and shared the security of a common anchor. Words of thanks were exchanged, but as the storm approached, the new-comers sought the security of their own private spaces. In solitude they rode out the storm together.

I am reminded of Dee's words that a sailor's life is one of solitude in the company of others. In a crowded anchorage I saw vessels enjoying the solitude of a beautiful, placid anchorage. People were quietly reading books, talking with their mates, or swimming around their boat, and for the asking, any one of them could have the help of over one hundred helping hands. I came to reconsider gatherings of people as support places where all you have to do is ask.

A simple life. I reflected on the purpose of the uneasy lived way at sea. I seemed to be living for no other reason than to live "out there," meeting and supporting others who were doing the same thing. Is that an unnatural focus? Is that

not what everyone wants from life? I came to know that it was what I wanted. It is such a simple notion; Linda was correct. Life is about simplification.

The question most often asked by people who discovered I was living on a boat was, “What do you do all day?” Aside from my writing, which took much of my day, I too wondered what sea ways would occupy my post-doctoral days. I considered and reflected upon the day-to-day ways of my sailing life.

I awaken to Nature’s first light appearing through the windowed hatch located over the head of my sleeping berth. Sal’s voice returns as I remember her saying how she felt immersed in Nature, witnessing her every mood. After coffee, I made the bed. I found myself studying the circular patterns of the bed spread, considering how they interacted in ways that revealed linear paths around the fabric’s edges. Smoothing the wrinkles out of the material with the palms of my hand, I aligned the edges with the side of the mattress. I felt in no need to hurry this task, and by moving within my own timeframe I found the simple motions of aligning the cloth, smoothing its surfaces, and tucking in its corners to relax and center me. I felt my life fall into a sense of order. It was a physical mantra, a study of circular linear patterning, a mandala experience in the Church of Daily Life.

Because I found myself becoming forgetful, I planned my day by making a list of things that needed to be done. At first my forgetfulness worried me, but then I remembered what Donna had come to know. At times in an “everyday is Friday” frame of mind, sailors forget things. As I reflected on the day’s list of tasks, I realized their primary focus revolved around obtaining my basic survival needs: food, water,

and shelter. As the activities of daily life became the “work” of each day, it occurred to me I was returning to a more primordial way; I was becoming a “hunter-gatherer.” In Dee’s words, I was becoming a more “primary being.”

The activities of daily living took longer to accomplish in sea places. The conveniences of the land such as washing machines, dish washers, and food processors, which Dee suggested made people dependent and less self-reliant beings, were absent in this new world. Bringing me to a more self-reliant way, I came to realize I was living Linda’s way of simplifying my life in order to realize its meaning.

The limited space of my ice box restricted the amount of fresh food I kept on the boat. I grocery shopped every day, walked miles to the nearest stores, and carried the food back in bags. As a result of this “inconvenience” I found myself purchasing fresher food because I frequented produce markets and bakeries rather than one-stop grocery stores. I bought ingredients for creating dishes rather than already prepared meals. The acts of chopping vegetables, mixing ingredients, measuring amounts, tasting, and smelling became a creative act for my crew’s coming together. Preparing a meal became an act of self-reliant, independent togetherness.

Clothes were taken to laundromats for washing. Captive in the small, close atmosphere of “laundry land,” I was surrounded by other women, all of whom were waiting for their spin-cycles to complete. I became aware of the uninhibited conversations that flowed freely among female strangers. They had no conversational agendas and anyone could join in. I came to know Laundromats as a gathering place where women came together to participate in various acts of cleansing. Discussions

about family, children, and the issues of the day flowed freely. I was reminded of Duerk's (1989) description of women's circles and how their informal circular gatherings served as places of mutual support.

Payphones became the most inconvenient inconvenience as it was our only means of affordable telephone communication with others left behind. Equipped with a phone card containing several hundred minutes of calling time, I scoured each of our ports of call for the closest working payphone. In some towns it was over a mile from the boat. The act of searching out and finding a payphone reminded me of what Barney had shared about communicating with those left behind. My lengthy searches for the illusive black phone booths gave me time to mentally compose the messages of love and support that I wanted to convey. The searching gave me time to dig deep and reflect before I spoke. I lived van Manen's (1990) more satisfying way of listening and speaking thoughtfully.

Simplified living is not easy. It takes deliberate planning to do it well. Having less in terms of conveniences has given me more of myself. I came to know that the simple acts that are built into this new life yield endless opportunities for my coming to being at mid-life.

Going "home" again. When I arrived back in Annapolis after being away for over two months, I felt a sense of coming home. The feeling did not come from the physical being in place, but rather from Bateson's (1994) way of knowing a home coming. My feelings of coming home came from discovering that the knowledge I already had from my past life connected with the knowledge I was continually taking

in on my journey. That feeling of connectedness created a kind of homecoming. It was as comforting and familiar as returning to one's physical place of home. It was a coming home to one's soul.

Returning to my familiar past place, I wanted people to think I looked different. I wanted my inner changes to show. Donna's voice reminded me that most people would notice nothing because they did not know the sea ways. She was correct. People greeted me as if I had never left the land. No one noticed that my relaxed and carefree look was the face of a newly born being. I came to know that my personal transformation was a gift I gave myself. In time as I touched their lives with my new way of thinking, others would come to "see" it, too.

Counterclockwise winds--a hurricane's way. How do new circles take form? With Hurricane Isabel threatening to break open my vessel with the power of her center's watchful "eye," I considered this question as she moved toward my boat. She was a category two northern hemisphere hurricane; that meant her winds circled counterclockwise at forces in excess of 83 knots. In meteorological terms, a hurricane begins as a low pressure weather system that develops into a tropical depression before it becomes a hurricane. The meteorological descriptions of her coming into being echo the description of my inner being's growing fear. Experiencing an inner cyclonic whirling that came about from my anticipation of her arrival, I, too, came to be a "low" and "depressed" being. After all, my boat and its crew lay in the forecasted path of this weather event.

A hurricane is bred from a "...surface level disturbance with enough connective activity to provide the spark necessary to get everything going" (Dashew, 1998, p. 348)). Capturing the meaning of my lived journey at sea, the language of weather gives voice to my new way. My being experienced a "disturbance" that caused a new "connectivity" with Others. My lived experience at sea created a hurricane within, a force that can transform all in its path.

I was afraid of Isabel; she was a god-force whose powers were bred from her passing over the "in-between" place, the warm water of the sea. My instincts told me to flee the "in-between" place and return my boat and crew to the land. My turning to the land as a place of sanctuary during a time of crisis surprised me. After all, had I not just written that my being's preferred way of experiencing life's storms was at sea? How can I turn my back on the meaning of my own metaphor? The question brought me to a phenomenological pause, a moment of reflection that brings one to meaning. I could not help but hear Gloria's knowing words calling me, "Barbara, remember, all that flies must land." I visualized my flying vessel propelling me to a safe haven, the land. It was now my turn to return to port and do what Barney called "stopping-off." This was to be my time for "grounding" as I reflected upon what it meant to return to the land. The land, the place of my "coming from," would now become the place of "going to."

For the time being, I left the "in-between" place of the sea to Isabel's stirring and opening-up ways. Like opening the lid of a jar, her whirling counterclockwise circles revealed the place of my beginning. Counterclockwise forces cause an

unwinding motion that opens closed vessels and reveals the “inside of things.” Once opened, the being found within the closed vessel is spewed forth onto the earth. Laid bare for all to see, it begins a rhythmic circular motion. I have come to know that the being housed within also can live quite well on land; beings who are reborn to the sea way thrive wherever they are “spilled out.”

Sailors name the moving of a boat from sea onto solid earth an act of putting the vessel “on the hard.” Being hauled out of the sea and securely propped upright on jack-stands immobilizes the boat on the firm ground of our past places. Once upon a time, I feared becoming “grounded” on the land; now I have come to know the meaning of Bateson’s (1990) words. She reminds me that the firmness of my past can be my place of refuge. Returning to the land and tethering my boat to the earth are reconsidered as acts of self-care and love.

The place chosen for my bodily refuge from Isabel was the home of Mary and Bruce, fellow sailors who offered me and my husband safe haven from the storm. Unable to reciprocate their gift of kindness with anything more than grateful acceptance, brought Cindy’s call of “What goes around comes around” to my ears. It became apparent that it was my turn to stand in the circle’s “coming around” place and receive the gifts of support from others. Once upon a time in the land of day-to-day ways, I would never have accepted another’s help so openly. Previous ways of being in the world as an “independent” woman would have caused me to by-pass offers of support. My new way of thinking brought me to know that a “centered” self

is not self-centered; she is “other-centered” as she joins her friends in the circle of life.

Donna’s voice reminded me that upon returning “home” to land I would be illuminated both by what I had learned at sea and what I have yet to learn. That “coming to” knowledge shines its illumination upon us during times of change and unrest. Nature’s force, Isabel, disrupted my voyage to my “going to” places. Yet, she brought me to know that my becoming’s new vision revealed “inside-full” views that would enable me to navigate through life’s foggy patches.

Navigating in the Fog

I believe Nova Scotia must translate to mean the land of fog. That will be my lasting memory of that rugged landscape which, for over a month, played a game of hide and seek behind blankets of endless fog. Living in the tension of having little or no visual reference point, other than the immediate place of my boat, gave way to a lived experience that resonated with the themes of my research. I traveled through banks of mist that obscured the horizon and enveloped my vessel in veils of clouds. There I felt the disorienting tensions of the lived way because I did not know where I was, what lay ahead, or what I left behind. I wondered if clarity would ever come. I needed to see what was coming up, what awaited me, and what was next.

The muses’ calls came to my aid. The fog reconsidered became Cindy’s layered paint on canvas. Sometimes you see through it to deeper levels, and other times, it is opaque bringing us to imagine what is hidden. We ponder the unseen areas

using our instinctive “radar.” Fog teaches us how to see past the everyday, and using our inner core, reconstruct new realities.

Like the uncertain times of our life, fog brings with it the gift of a new way of seeing. It takes us from a clear “visioned” world into an amorphous place filled with self doubt. It demands that we break free from the comforts of the known and the seen and seek another way of being. Learning to see through it with our “inner” radar, we are brought from the predictable safe places of life to ones of new possibilities.

The only way to safely transit fog at sea is with the use of the boat’s radar. Having used this navigational tool daily for almost a month, I learned a new way of “seeing through.” Dee’s voice reminded me that to learn new ways one must be “ready to learn” and “primed.” I have come to know that women, like me, who have come to their centers and have left the dock, are indeed primed and ready to advance into foggy places. We are prepared to use our instinctual radar and to trust it as we navigate through the foggy, tension filled places of mid-life.

Abram (1996) expresses the way of being in fog. It feels like, “...standing in the midst of an eternity, a vast and inexhaustible present” (p. 202). Being in the inexhaustible present resonates with the Buddhist notion of living in the moment, the place where the clarity of life comes into focus. In the fog, past and future are absent, and it is only in their absence that the present appears. Present moments or “presence” (Abram, 1996, p. 203) is vibrant and alive, and it takes shape through our sensory landscape. The acute nature of presence embedded in a vivid sensory experience makes this place of the present our true reality as it was intended to be (Abram,

1996). Right here, right now we discover "...this open present, I am unable to isolate space from time, or vice versa, I am immersed in the world (Abram, 1996, p. 204).

Our instincts, our true senses come to being in the fog, and when they are available to us, our path to Avalon is illuminated.

The Fog Lifts to New Horizons

Eventually, as the fog lifted I was able to see in my customary way. People, houses, and land contours of trees and shorelines came into view, but I saw them differently. Their stark appearance was enhanced by the nothingness of the fog. What was real, the formed or the formless? My time in the fog had changed me in a circular way.

I transited through the fog and had come to know that all being meets in the circle's foggy "full middle" (Grigg, 1990, p. 31), a place where "...the water of sea and the air of sky is the earth of ship and the fire of sailor, all together in a special togetherness" (p. 31). Sailing in a flotilla of beings on the foggy place of "in-between," lends itself to conversation, questioning, and purposeful thought.

Following a circular track, unified beings walk, sail, run, peddle, or ride through life in intentional motion.

When we walk in the wholesomeness of thought, we walk in the openness of the ontological difference; and our walking shifts accordingly into a world-spanning stride, a stride of beauty, gathering the whole of time and the whole of space into its melodic rhythm - into the understanding body which unifies the meditation of our steps. (Levin, 1985, p. 276)

The meditation of circular motion and its opening ways unifies those who are present to us and those whose undertaking is intentional. As she wanders the globe on

a mid-life journey, Gelman (2001) draws Others in her immediate present to her by intentionally sharing her experiences with them. She remains ever alert for chance encounters, for the new friendships she makes each day define her life. “I use the word *friend* loosely, to refer to people I connect with” (Gelman, 2001, p. 302). To connect with Others is to be present with them. It is a form of interacting where one savors the moment of encounter by being inside the sounds and meaning of their words (Gelman, 2001).

As the fog lifts, it becomes clear what we must do. Women with new ways of seeing and who are connected in friendship will keep the flotilla of Others afloat. Through this research, we have come to know that whether Others are becalmed, cast away, marooned, or overboard they all define our lives and our being. We must work together to keep them near by finding new ways of leaving no one behind.

Becalmed beings. Resulting in a stationary or motionless state of being, *becalmed* beings are momentarily without wind to move them along life’s circular course. The etymology of the word *calm* is a “time of rest, stillness” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 99). Content in their place of stillness, some women live their lives in a becalmed state for an extended time. Sailors call this state of being the “doldrums.” Implying an undesirable way of being in the world, *doldrums* means to be “dull, foolish, or inactive” (Barnhart, 1995, p. 217). Depression is the contemporary word often used to describe women in the doldrums, unable to “get on with their lives.” Duerk (1989) suggests:

Depression comes as a gift asking that a woman recognize her own substance and trust it as the quiet, steady voice of her own truth. As she trusts it,

hearkens to it, attends (to it) as it unfolds, she learns that (which is) of herself, (was) never allowed to develop when her allegiance was with the collective. (p. 66)

If the seas remain calm, the doldrums can be used as a balanced place with little movement or change where beings can find their centers. Knowing that supportive Others are there if seas get rough; becalmed ones remain in their motionless state, using it as a time of reflection. Becalmed states of being supported by watchful Others, however, are only temporary because eventually the wind comes up, moving vessels to new venues. No longer becalmed the once stationary ships join the moving flotilla and experience the winds of change, the “blown out” (Mizuno, 1972, p. 132) winds of nirvana.

Castaway beings. What about those who live on the fringe of the circle-- castaway, isolated, sad, and alone? Caught in eddies that line the circular track, these beings exist outside the boundary of the “in-between” place. Sailing against strong currents, they struggle to get back into the circle to have their voices heard. Their saddened calls reach us. We worry they will float away, become lost, or worse, lose themselves by drowning in “everydayness” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 15). Do we actively listen for them and hearken to their call? When we hear a castaway’s call of sadness, what do enlightened women do?

Enlightened women have come to know that they can support saddened beings with their presence and love (Duerk, 1989). They have come to know that the castaway’s healing and return to the fleet only can come from within their vessel, their own being. Thus, knowing the way, the wise ones support “castaways” with acts

of “presence” (Abrams, 1996, p. 203). Hearing their calls of pain and sadness amplifies our own callings to the world, and as our tears of sadness fill the oceans, our flotillas of beings rise up with the ensuing tide. When fortified with numbers of able-bodied vessels, flotillas of women become mighty arsenals, indeed.

Women overboard. Their vessels engulfed by life’s tumultuous seas cause some sailors to abandon their ships. Jumping into the place of “in-between,” sinking to the ground of every day ways, and swimming for their lives in a sea of bewilderment, the once balanced and centered souls sink into life’s abyss. Palmer (2000) suggests that women who leave their vessels (their true nature) behind can become spiritually oppressed. “Women overboard” becomes our cry, and watchful sailors turn their vessels around to rescue one of their own; it is their inherent way. To come to the aid of another and swim the seas of “in-between” exposes our soul outside the safety of our vessel, but it is in this most vulnerable exposed state that we become open and primed for meaningful sharing. As we throw them life rings, encircle their bodies with ours, and breathe the breath of life into their souls, we perform acts of love and compassion. These are acts of self-rescue, in that, to rescue another saves us all. As Gina has come to know, sharing lived ways validates what sailors do. Enlightened women leave no woman behind.

Beings global. Residing on a planet spinning around itself as it rounds the sun, is to reside in a place of continuous circling. Mid-life women are global beings; they are circular citizens of earth. Sailors all, we circle our centers and journey to places of choice and desire, regret and pain, and happenstance and joy. When hands

are extended and hearts are open, a sea of support helps all women come to knowing ways for weathering life's storms.

Coming to knowledge is an endless circular journey that builds upon our foundational knowledge. As new knowing ways fill gaps or build new layers, we are shaped and reshaped. Like mollusks, our shells of knowledge are exuded from within. The building material seeps through us and covers us where needed. "When the seeping starts the house is already completed" (Bachelard, 1958, p. 108). Coming to knowledge is a process of "form-giving life, the mystery of slow, continuous formation" (Bachelard, p. 106).

Regardless of differences in physical and social ways, all women participate in the flotilla of mid-life learners. Do we turn away or hearken to each other's calls? A choice lies in the space that lies between the question mark and answer. Changed by the words we have written, perhaps the answers have evolved to new levels. Reaching out to each other, we support the journeys of women worldwide. As we stand on the edge of mid-life's circular shores along the tracks that connect all women, we reflect on what we have come to know and embrace the opportunities to share it with the Others of our life.

Another Horizon

Mid-life sailors voyage across vast oceans in search of something upon which they can not quite put their fingers. Being in a place of aqueous formation returns them to a primordial way of being; thus rendered, they consider, "What lies over the next horizon?" In the middle places of life, we partake of that which is earthly and

also strive for a form of motility that is celestial (Levin, 1985). Middle year sea beings participate in their earthly realm, the sea, and from being in that celestial place called “in-between” they use their knowledge to strike outward another horizon .

Coming to know. I have journeyed to the sea and back with my sailing muses, and I no longer am grounded or stuck, in the “muck” of my perceived “mere” existence. “Stuck” is being “in a space which is frozen into a dualistically polarized, and hence deeply conflicted, structure that is inimical to change, growth and in general a meaningful creative existence” (Levin, 1985, p. 343). No longer of that way, my vessel has lifted from the sea bed, and I am sailing on a circular track toward the sun. That which transpired for me during this scholarly work has begun my transcendence from my former way of being. As I am this work and the words are me, the meaning I have come to know has reshaped the being I have become and the one who continues to unfold.

Women’s vessels are on a continuous circular track through life. The water moves swiftly beneath us, fog surrounds us, and the winds of change occasionally blow us off course. The starting place, the place of our beginning, vanishes in our wake. When our mid-life vessel crosses its outbound track, we arrive in a new “restarting” place. Standing on the decks of our ships, we ask, “What is next?” The muses know the answer, and respond, “The next stop on the trip around takes us to enlightenment.” Steering our vessels slightly to port, we begin the next leg of our westward voyage on the endless journey to meaning.

My fellow journeywomen call out what they have come to know. It validates their very way of being on the sea. They have come to know they travel alone in the company of others. They have come to know the journey never ends; it never stops. Gina lives on a boat, works as a legal secretary, and raises her child as she journeys to meaning. Cindy lives on a boat, ice skates and paints pictures of diesel engines as she journeys to meaning. Gloria is a newly wed who lives on a boat which is sailing around the world as she journeys to meaning. Dee is living on a boat rebuilding its interior and is learning to be a nurse's aide as she journeys to meaning. Linda lives on a boat, captains transient boats, and raises her child as she journeys to meaning. Barney lives on a boat and works in a boat supply store as she supports her distant family as she journeys to meaning. Donna lives on a boat and is returning to sea for another voyage as she journeys to meaning. I live on a sailboat and write my way to meaning through this doctoral research as I journey to meaning, indeed! Mid-life women who have altered their thinking to reconsider life as a journey that impacts their personal relationships and perceptions of time and space can impact the world. It is like throwing a pebble into a pond. Each stone causes a ripple that creates and affects the next. As the concentric rings of change ripple out, they initiate new connections with all of whom they touch (Bolen, 1999).

Regardless of their journey's undertakings, the ways in which mid-life women interact with like Others matters. Like participants in a game of musical chairs, we skip, run, and walk together around a circle of seats, and when the music stops, all but one sits down. No longer content leaving one standing, enlightened

women move over, make room, grab a hand, and show the standing Other her new seat. Martha Montero-Seiburth expresses this welcoming way in Neumann and Peterson's (1997) work, "...I have come to appreciate that one may serve as a catalyst to create the space within which others may discover their power" (p. 126).

The space we make for each other is the place we all seek. The location is soft as we sink into it. "There is softness in the world that understands the hardness of ourselves, until we find the softness of our not-selves. So, we make our way until the Way is found" (Grigg, 1990, p. 33). The way to this space is without languaged description, for it is ineffable. Enlightened beings, we are no longer "...dizzied by the turning of words. Between words there is still a place that is reached simply by forgetting words" (Grigg, 1990, p. 27).

Together in a circle of learning, the women of this study came to know their power. When they shifted their weight, moved over, and made space for the Other, me, they came to know how their knowing ways could change the life of another, mine. The muses reached back to show me their way, an enlightened path for coming to know the world. If I can be illuminated and transformed by their knowing ways perhaps others can too. When a critical number of people come to know a way of being that changes how they think and behave in the world, the culture does also and a new era begins (Bolen, 1999).

I feel as if I have learned a new dialect. It speaks a language of compassion, love, time for self, self-reliance, and consideration for the planet. It is reminiscent of forgotten ways and forgotten ideas. New language breeds new ways of thinking, but

still suspicious of my new voice, I wonder, “Am I naive to think there are really one hundred hands waiting to help me, ‘perfect’ strangers interested in my every word, and a sister called Mother Nature who will comfort and rock me to sleep?”

Wondering about. Duerk (1989) asks,

How might your life have been different, if, as a young woman, there had been a place for you, a place where you could go to be with women? A place where you could be received as you strove to order your moments and your days. A place where you could learn a quiet centeredness...to help you ground yourself in daily patterns that would nurture you through their gentle rhythms...a place where, in the stillness at the ending of a task, you could feel an ancient presence flowing out to sustain you...and you learned how to receive and to sustain it in return. How might your life be different? (p. 97)

I am now able to answer that question for myself, for at sea I have found those women, and I have found that place, and my life is different. My only regret is that I came to know the power of those forces at a time well past youth, mid-life. Dee’s words comfort me by reminding me that women learn at different speeds and not all are “primed” at the same time. I am at peace knowing that it is not too late to become all that I can be, but I wonder about the Others, women of all ages, who feel their time is running out. I want to call to them, “It is not too late. Hold on to my vessel, and I will show you a new way of being in the world, the sea way.”

The female journey to womanhood goes on forever. It starts at birth and takes us beyond death itself. I wonder about ways feminine beings can support each other on that endless road. I wonder about ways women can reach behind for the hand of a “younger one.” I wonder about ways women can call to girls, “women under construction,” about the female way of being in the world. I wonder about ways women can send all feminine ones a hearkening call to strengthen their vessels before

the storm. I wonder about ways wise women, “standing watch,” can slow their vessels to bring novice sailors along side. I wonder about ways women and girls can reach forward to grasp the trailing hands of the “wise ones.” I wonder about ways wise women’s songs of illumination can be shared with all. I wonder about ways women and girls can alljoin hands in multigenerational circles of strength that circle the globe. I wonder about ways a female’s smallest gestures of support, individual acts of kindness, and knowing ways can ultimately change our world.

“I Wonder About Ways...”

I wonder about my wondering way.
Does it lead to anything new to say?
All ages of women join as one.
Do we know how this is done?

I don’t know how to teach the younger,
for I have been too busy to bother.
Don’t be shocked that I am so lost,
many women have paid this heavy cost.
By being present to their “busy day,”
women have forgotten the female way.

I wonder about this wondering way.
Can we reach behind for those at play?
Can we reach ahead to learn the Way?
Yes, indeed, follow me to an enlightened way. (Schaefer, 2003)

My wonderings bring me to wonderment; indeed, I feel “wonder-full.” The spinning ways of wonderment widen my view of the feminine and take me to a new horizon. Jung (1982) brings me to consider a deeper meaning of feminine nature, one that is genderless. He suggests “...there is also the man’s own femininity to explain the feminine nature of the soul-complex” (p. 78). Reflecting on his words, I consider a feminine way of being in the world with the Other that goes beyond the limits of

gender naming. Reaching hands, calling voices, and teaching caring ways reconsidered are, in fact, acts that can be carried out by any human being. Jung deepens the meaning of this soul work to include a feminine dimension of the human way that is not gender specific.

Here (embodied within a woman), without a doubt, is one of the main sources for the feminine quality of the soul. But it does not seem to be the only source. No man is so entirely masculine that he has nothing feminine in him. (pp. 76-77)

Indeed, any human being's realization of their female dimension can bring them to their soul. Perhaps it is the feminine aspect our being (women and men) that contributes to our humanness.

Newly informed with the meanings learned from the lives of these sea women, I travel onward with a new way of thinking that will touch the beings I encounter. The ripples I create will travel outward to shape the lives of those who hearken to my call, and they, in turn, will ripple out bringing others to the experience of a new way. Around and around our knowing ways will go as our concentric circles cover the world.

My spinning mind filled with unanswered questions about female ways of being in the world now desires to open up yet more meaning. Inspired by what I have come to know, I am compelled to dig for more buried treasures. I hear a call to seek out and unearth the meaning of the lived experience of the "wise ones," women in their seventh decade and beyond who are journeying ahead of me. Being in the company of sailing women who are still at sea during their advanced senior years,

may serve to illuminate meaning for those of us traveling in their wake. I am called to them and I will seek them out, for Avalon awaits me “there.”

Inspired by the thoughts of many, I have journeyed to “there,” to Avalon. With my newly formed voice I composed a poem or two along the way that I used to express the wordless ways of the ineffable. I now find it fitting to mark the place of my continuing end with yet another poetic pause.

“Almost There”

I was sailing from some where to some place,
 with the wind in my hair and face.
 Two mock suns shown on high,
 gifts from Barney’s watching sky.
 A backward glance to Donna’s past;
 Takes me to Dee’s decks, solitude at last.
 Gloria’s boat to horizon flees,
 in tandem traveling around the seas.
 No idea of time of day,
 Gina reminds me I am on my way.
 Layers and layers, Cindy’s balanced ways,
 coupled with Linda’s simplified days.
 I leave a track of wake behind,
 slowly losing track of time.
 Time finally lost, I know I’m near,
 I am almost home, I’m almost “there.” (Schaefer, 2003)

We women perceive other horizons ahead, hear other calls that reverberate throughout our beings, and remember other memories that reveal the hidden. Pausing on the grounds of our becoming, we discover that our vessels are still moving. Instinctively we raise our sails to catch a fresh breeze to move us toward tomorrow. Anchors away! Here we go again, women venturing forth, on our eternal journey to meaning.

APPENDIX A: ADVERTISEMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS**Wanted: Participants for Doctoral Research on Women “Live Aboards”**

Women aged 40-60 who are currently living on a sailboat are being sought to participate in a doctoral research study being conducted by a student from the University Of Maryland College Of Education. Participants will agree to two, 2 hour conversations; the content of which will be centered on the daily living experiences of women who live on board and who actively sail a cruising sailboat.

The purpose of these conversations is to facilitate a deeper understanding about women’s mid-life choice to live on a sailboat and sail to sea. A modest honorarium will be awarded to those qualified candidates who complete the two conversations. If interested, please contact Barbara Schaefer at 410-295-1598 or at gosi120@hotmail.com.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Cover Letter for Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your expressed interest in my research. The study will explore the experience of mid-life women who have chosen to live onboard a sailboat that sails to overseas destinations. One way that I plan to uncover this phenomenon is through conversations about experiences you have had living and sailing onboard your sailboat. During our time together, we will engage in one or two audio taped conversations. You will also be asked to write a descriptive account about your experience. If you choose, you will not be identified by your real name in the published findings, but you may have your first name referenced if you desire. After the research is completed, I will share my insights with you.

I hope you will agree to participate in my research by signing the attached consent form. You may contact me at 410-295-1598 or via email at gosi120@hotmail.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Schaefer

Consent Form

Identification of Project/Title	Sailing Mid-life's Seas: The Journeys of Voyaging Women
Statement of Age of Subject	I state that I am over 18 years of age, in good physical health, and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Barbara Schaefer in the Department of Education, Development, Policy and Leadership in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park.
Purpose	I understand the purpose of this research is to study the experiences of mid-life women who are living on sailboats during their mid-life years for the purpose of informing educational practice unique to this age group.
Procedures	As a participant, I understand I will be involved in 2-3 conversational sessions that are 2 hours long. I will also write a short essay. The conversations and writing will be about my experience of living on a sailboat.
Confidentiality	I understand that I can remain anonymous or that I may give specific written permission to use my first name. I understand that I have the right to request that specific written information or conversation not be used in the study. I understand that I will be told of any tape recorders present during recorded conversations and that I may ask that recorder be turned off at any time.
Risks	I understand that as a result of examining my experiences of living aboard a sailboat and sailing out to sea may cause me to contemplate my life choice in a different way. This might promote anxiety or concern. I understand that there are normally no long-term effects to the contemplative experience involved in this research.
Benefits, Freedom to withdraw	I understand that this study is not designed to help me personally, but that the investigator hopes to learn more about the experience of women who in their mid-life chose to live a sea life for informing educational practice for this age group. I understand that I am free to ask questions or withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
Name/Address and phone of Graduate Researcher	Barbara Schaefer 201 Washington Street Annapolis MD 21403 410-295-16598 Gosi120@hotmail.com
Name/Address and phone of Faculty Advisor	Dr. Francine Hultgren Department of Education, Policy and Leadership University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 301-405-4562 fh14@uemail.umd.edu

 Signature of Participant

 Date

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