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**The Essence of Place:
A Research Survey and Personal Journey
From Place to Place**

Erin E. Hall

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Introduction to the Research

The world around us presents possibilities to individuals through the experiences of everyday life. Human beings find themselves situated in relation to those possibilities every day and must select from each presentation of possibilities how to deal with each individual experience. What people select from among the possibilities is what constitutes their world, and the selection seems to be guided by a perspective. As Heidegger explains, our being and our world are fundamentally a matter of our 'thereness' in a particular situation (Tilley 13). The question, then, is one of how a person in a particular situation is relating to that situation and how meaning is emerging. Meaning comes not only from the person, but also from the person's being in the situation itself.

Researchers from many fields support the idea that the essence of place must be explored from the perspective of experience. According to prominent geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in his book *Space and Place*, "experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality" (8). This experience is vital for understanding a person's perspective while within a specific place. Geographer Douglas Pocock contributes the idea that "the real concept of place provides an organizing concept for what is termed our immersion in... the world. With its experiential perspective and varied scale, place relates to an area which is bounded and has distinctive internal structure, to which meaning is attributed and which evokes an affective response" (17).

Qualitative Analysis and Place

Archaeologists and cultural anthropologist Christopher Tilley also agrees that "To be human is both to create this distance between the self and that which is beyond and to attempt to bridge this distance through a variety of means - through perception (seeing, hearing, touching), bodily actions and movements, and intentionality, emotion and awareness residing in systems of belief and decision-making, remembrance and evaluation" (12). Because the knowledge of place is based upon personal or shared experiences of an individual in a specific place, the logical method of research for this task involves qualitative analysis. The inclusion of private experiences, the view of the world from the perspective of the self, is a "crucial ingredient of human understanding" (Denzin 1027). Hoping to produce richer and more detailed accounts, phenomenological researchers let words present and generate images of a person's inner world ... when that person is experiencing a particular place at a specific time. In this way interpretation from research to representation can reflect the process of retrieving detailed narratives from the individuals - illuminating the obvious conceptual similarities and often subtle differences.

Specific Studies

If consciousness during the experience of place causes a person to choose from possibilities in his world with his own knowledge and perspective, then incorporating the insights of Gestalt psychology could benefit this study. Kurt Lewin was one of the first researchers who tried to analyze and classify the different systems at work in the environment of a human being. Participants in

Lewin's research responded verbally to complex stimulus situations. He and other Gestalt psychologists "discovered the importance of the context of the stimulus and its influence on the meaning of the stimulus itself" (Krasner 321). The participating psychologists felt that results from sensory experience must be understood by looking to the organization or configuration of circumstances. Some parts of the world become figural as they catch our attention, while other parts of the world become background as they recede from us as not so important. The aspects of perceiving change and making choices about how a place influences us is also influenced by the relationship that an individual brings with him to the place itself. Both these directives help determine exactly how an individual responds to any given place. Some elements of the perceptual area of the place will be enhanced, while the individual might ignore other elements of the place. By searching for a unified whole during the study of place, we can attend to elements on the periphery of influence. At the same time, we can continue to focus on the essential meaning of the essence of place.

Variables of Place

The intricate, yet coherent, structure of place has many variables in both its inherent nature and in its atmospheric elements. Absorption and Intensity are two elements in an encounter between person and world that represent a real relationship of presence that many artists seem to have with place. This quality of engagement is supported by Rorschach responses "that indicate that people can more accurately observe precisely when they are emotionally involved -the person sees sharper and more accurately when his emotions are engaged"

(May, Create 50). J.H. Van den Berg observed that “poets and painters are born phenomenologists” (61). The twentieth-century French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard explains the resonance and repercussion of this art as something bearing “a phenomenological mark that is unmistakable” (Bachelard xxiii). The influence of place is intensely felt by artists and poets because of imagination and other aspects of the creative process which link the artist and the place and solidify the artist’s understanding of that place. By examining their expression of image, we may decipher clear, elementary lessons. If we allow these images that we come in contact with to speak to us, visual presentation receives additional value. As the “poetic image places us at the origin of the (artist) speaking being” its unmistakable mark may awaken new depths within us (xxiii). By examining the moment, Bachelard expresses the impact of place upon the person in that experience and explains that the relationship between a person and a very meaningful place is defining in many ways (Buttimer 167).

Additional Contributing Factors

Identification with a place includes factors within the person that can stem from symbol, emotion, or culture. All aspects in a person’s life contribute to that person’s perspective and choices. Richard Quinney is a photographer who “uses images to interpret and render his own experiences, reflections, and memories” (Denzin 727). Tom Slayton, in his book *Sabra Field: the Art of Place*, explores printmaking as an expression of the artist’s experience with landscape as place. “Time and work, commitment and love - and enormous talent and skill - all these are part of Sabra Field’s vision, and all contribute to her strong evocation of a

specific place” (Slayton 62). His book is only one of many to illustrate the interaction of place and person. Other sources support the influencing aspects of a sense of place upon the thoughts and actions of the artist based upon their experiences of landscape and the environment. Picasso’s consistent view of painter as interpreter is reflected by his friend Eluard who states that for the artist “there is only communication between what he sees and what is seen” (Ashton xxiii). Liberman adds that Picasso sees paintings as “research and experiment” (72). Visual artists such as Van Gogh and Cezanne visually meet those in the literary field. Rilke interprets the demand that the presence of place can make upon us when he speaks of participation necessary in allowing harmonious forms into our own lives, “for there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life” (May, Create 119). The writings of Kierkegaard accentuate this idea that “through the choices we make, we create our lives, and ultimately become ourselves” (122). Kierkegaard explains much of what has developed in my thinking even before I read any of his well-known works. We make choices in each place where we find ourselves, and each choice in a place helps to create who we are and who we become. It is interesting to note that place is also a huge part of the development of any character within a literary work. This belief is supported by a common theme denoting the existence of a geographical location as a “place - a tangible reality of certain memorable and describable elements, and as an image, a state of mind adduced by place which is, admittedly less tangible but no less real” (Andrews 174). A comment from historian Joan Scott implies that perhaps forms of art are especially good forms

of qualitative analysis; "(visual and written) experience is at once already an interpretation and in need of interpretation" (Denzin 228).

Lasting Memories of Place

Even children seek places to experience, places to play, to explore, to question, and just to be. As Paul Shepard describes, the "child must have a residential opportunity to *soak in a place*, and . . . the adolescent and adult must be able to return to that place to ponder the visible substrate of his own personality" (32). When the child is older, memory and reflection can bring him back to these places. Moore's research results show that "home-sites, open space, vegetation, natural ground surfaces, and pathways "are children's most frequently mentioned places from interviews and drawings (40). A child's direct experience of place aids in the construction and development of spatial cognition which results in "recognition, identification, assimilation, and ultimate representation" of place (Hart 91).

By looking to participants in society for a picture of everyday life, phenomenology and existential thought offer the basis for exploring the meaning of place. To understand this unique perspective, we must look to icons of philosophical history. Binswanger uses the metaphor of the forest to express the vast range of possibilities available to humans in selecting self-world relationships, which are not possible for other creatures. The human world also adds a layer of meaning to the existing environment based upon interrelationship of the elements within it. By addressing the basis on which we relate, we may learn more about what a particular "something" in the world

means to the individual. Western thought tends to follow the belief that a statement is most true when separation from the self is maximized. This mental detachment can be avoided by acknowledging a readiness for action, decision, or commitment which ensures engagement and potential enlargement of being in the world. Kierkegaard points out in an attack upon the subject-object split that in a given situation we must search for “the truth which is essentially related to existence” (May, Being 176). Nietzsche believed that ideally “we ourselves want to be our experiments” (76). Each person chooses how to deal with his experiences based on his own unique perspective. Individual perspective is also described by Merleau-Ponty:

The fact is that if we want to describe it, we must say that my experience breaks forth into things and transcends itself in them, because it always comes into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body...inescapably linked with phenomena...It is my involvement in a point of view which makes possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception (Merleau-Ponty 303-4).

Knowing a place, leaving a place, discovering a place, desiring a place, revisiting a place- these are all actions which we experience through the passivity of being. Husserl advocated the integral nature of person and place by

emphasizing that the “relation between perception and its objects is not passive; rather human consciousness actively constitutes objects of experience... consciousness-of-something” (Denzin 488). Directionalities are bits of language necessary for communicating about a place and are “legacies of bodily orientation in places (as Kant reminds us) and are elicited by powers inherent in places themselves (as Aristotle affirms)” (Feld 46). Sartre’s contribution indicates that in this world “we have no alternative but to choose...and in doing that...we are creating ourselves” (Magee 217). By exploring place with a phenomenological approach, we address the manner in which people experience and understand the world. Thomas and Pollio illustrate the use of this phenomenological process in their book, Listening to Patients. Using an interpretive research group in this type of study adds diverse perspectives to the analysis and interpretation discussion and positive contributions to the quality and accuracy of the results. In the Phenomenology of Everyday Life the authors explain that in phenomenological psychology, results seek to describe some aspect of human life “as it is lived and reflected upon in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity” (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 5). This specific type of research offers a depth of information not found in other types of studies. Phenomenological research offers original words from individuals in a particular place and illustrates from their own perspective how place affects them. This intriguing aspect of the experience of place is one of the factors leading to my study. This paper is an exploration into the human meaning of

place in our environment, as described by individuals in their own words and analyzed into thematic units.

Six Common Themes Found in Place Narratives

A collection of individual responses completes an additional layer of the place study. By eliciting responses from ninety male and female student participants in a university setting, a synthesis of general ideas arises. This study questions each person regarding their awareness in a place and requests a description of this place and its meaningful aspects. A group analysis of the responses reveals six main themes: *Stillness, Familiarity, Challenge, Confinement, Harmony, and Beauty*. The recurring themes, or meaning units, are identified, defined, and presented, using the actual words of the participants. By explaining each theme, a holistic understanding of place reveals itself. The person having an experience of place becomes aware of sensory stimulation or lack of such stimulation within a particular environment. The following is the best example of the first evident theme from the participants (Stillness):

“When I crawl into bed at night and the lights go off, I am particularly aware of everything...I am aware of the moonlight coming in the window...odd shadows off the furniture. It seems to make things move and change...My senses become more acute...Shadows that weren't anything much before, turn into things that I need to be alarmed over...I am aware also of how things feel. When my eyes can no longer see

something, for instance the pillow, I become more aware of how it feels. I can look at something, and pick up its outline in the dark. I think I can feel it, but it is too far away. It is like I perceive its feel” (participant # 30).

This passage and the one that follows relate to descriptions by author Frances Downing as she explains the effect of the stillness of a place - “places of strong light or deep shadow, places that are soft or hard, textured or smooth ... strong, powerful, compelling, and identifying ... marking the presence of ‘charged’ energy or deep quiet” (35). Another participant explains a lack of movement within a place by saying,

“As the teacher stood there awaiting an answer, the classroom became silent as a morgue...bodies rested in the chairs, motionless...I could hear the clock tick louder and louder, echoing through my ears as if trying to torment me when, in actuality, there wasn’t even a clock in the room. Time just seemed to stand still” (participant # 3).

The theme of stillness, or the opposite - activity, is found in many narratives about place. Specific words describe the feeling and the meaning of the concept. The second emergent theme from the participants is Familiarity. When a person is conscious of his surroundings, details stimulate multiple sensory fields. Many of the participants give details about the physical aspects of the place that they

describe. One of the best examples describes the visual and olfactory stimulation that this participant experienced while cleaning out her horse's stall.

She recounts,

“Memories are mostly associated with smell. I remember walking into the dimness of the 12X12 stall from the brightness of outside, pitchfork in hand. Rays of sunlight came in from the glass window on the side wall, and lit up areas of the yellow straw so that it appeared to shine. I was aware of big piles of brown poop, everywhere and one area that smelled very strongly of ammonia... The smell was overpowering as I pitched the top layers of straw into the wheel barrow...When I cleaned, I remember the smell of the lime I sprinkled and poured on the dirt floor to mask the dead smell...I throw down 3 or 4 bales of straw from the loft above and jump back down into the stall. Throwing the straw all over was fun and all the little dirt particles would get into my nose and cause me to sneeze. It smells so good then, and I think how happy my horse would be when he lay down that night to sleep” (participant # 21).

This description illustrates details relating to the strangeness or familiarity of elements within a place. During her explanation of experience, participant no. 16

describes the place she and her friends watch a meteor shower, a familiar location which she comes to view in a new way.

“There were two cars parked on the sidewalk in front of the house, and we were all laying on the hoods and roofs of the cars. It felt strange to see a street that I saw almost everyday from a new perspective. When the meteor shower started, everything was quiet. It was an eerie quietness because that street is usually so busy and loud. There was not traffic on the street, which was also smelled of car exhaust, cigarette smoke, and yard flowers. It was just so strange because we all lay there for nearly an hour, silent, and watching the stars fall” (participant # 16).

A third theme, one of Confinement, is noted as Participant no. 1 describes a place of lack of freedom and of very limited possibilities when he says,

“Being in jail...the first thing I was aware of was confined freedom. What I mean is that physically I was locked up and away from the rest of the world, but mentally I could think what I wanted at that particular moment. Thoughts of my parents, friends, and relatives appeared in my head. Thoughts of my childhood, maybe where I had gone wrong...Next, I noticed the plain walls that surrounded me in every

direction. They made me realize that a life of crime would secure me in a position to look at those plain walls every day. Not wishing to pursue that future, I realized the surroundings tthat I was in at that instant, and I decided to stay away from that life”

(participant # 1).

A description of mountain biking offers feelings from one individual related to the topic of challenge. The fourth recurring theme in this study is illustrated by participant no. 9:

“I do this on purpose because it is one place I know I can go where nothing will interfere with me, except actual obstacles on the trails. I become so focused on the movements needed to be made while riding, that I actually forget about everything else in my life beyond the forest ... riding out on trails at accelerated speeds makes me forget about everything else but the exact, current motion that is being made. It is sort of the timelessness that is there...mountain biking is simply my getaway from the daily grind of life”

Another participant also offers a description of opportunities, obstacles, and challenges. Participant no. 39 begins,

“On this particular day, the top of this mountain is completely quiet. There is no wind, but only a quiet

breeze. The air is cold and crisp, and burns in the lungs when I breathe it...the sun is very strong and reflects in myriads of light into my eyes which also burn. As I look down, I realize what a great descent I will have, a safe descent on my skis, a safe descent which will bring me back down to the valley below. As I look down, I know that on my way down I have to be more careful than usual because I am alone. Being alone in this kind of skiing terrain asks a lot of responsibility from me...The trees stand there covered with snow, silent; time seems endless as there is no movement. The trees stand there, creating the perfect obstacles...As I look down, I am aware that people are waiting for me, and I have to make sure that I get there. I am aware that my equipment has been prepared. My bindings are tight... The snow is perfect and the skis are ready" (participant # 39).

A fifth common theme evokes an impression of Harmony and connection. The place itself can seem to fit or be in harmony with a particular person or can invoke a disjunctive undertone. Participant no. 35 dwells on a positive personal connection and harmony when she describes a visit to India, her homeland. She states,

“I have never experienced a place quite like it. I arrived at the airport as the sun was setting and several family members greeted me with a warmth I have only felt there...As we exited the airport, I felt the gentle breezes of the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal in harmony. It carried with it the fragrance of the jasmine and rose garlands found at the little shop nearby. Suddenly, the scent of the spices and pastries directed my attention to the nearest open-air restaurant...The air was mystical, the dense sandal wood trees were aromatic, and the sky was filled with stars. The overwhelming theme was beauty... I captured in my soul the experience of being Indian and tattooed it in the back of my mind”
(participant # 35).

The atmosphere or particular elements within an environment can seem beautiful or full of grandeur in a specific place. A sixth theme of Beauty is mentioned by Participant no. 28 when he describes the beauty of a countryside landscape as he helps his father tear down an old tenant house in the middle of their farm. He explains,

“As we took the tractor and we pulled on each wall, one decayed support at a time, I was aware of our farmland and the beauty of the countryside...As the

house began to lose walls one by one, we would set aside items such as old boards and tin sheets to be used again and preserve history. The roof finally fell to the ground and the dust cleared. That afternoon from the sun porch, as the sun was setting, it was a different scene, to look through the fields and pastures and not see the roof of the tenant house that was no more” (participant # 28).

Another participant illustrates beauty as she describes a visit to France.

Individuals often remember vivid details from places that they visit.

“When I was in France a couple of years ago, we stopped in the mountain town / village called Eze. Eze overlooks the Ester d Azur Arkis not far from Monaco on the Riviera. The most striking aspect of the place was the extreme blueness of the water, so much so that it was sometimes hard to delineate the sky from the water at the edge of the horizon. The area in and around the actual town is rock, and almost desert like. There was a slight breeze and you could feel a dryness in the air intermingled with a cool breeze from the water. The smell of desert-like flowers mixed with the smell of sweat and sweet perfume from the local inhabitants. The view was

exhilarating and the whole experience was totally
extraordinary” (participant #43).

Memories of a place retain a certain concrete nature which combines individual elements and vague impressions.

Summary of the Effects of Place

Each of these themes gives a hint about the strong, lingering essence of place. Participant no. 32 uses these words to explain, “certain places...are impossible to ignore...a feeling comes over me that doesn’t let me forget where I am.” Just as the human brain attends to millions of bits of information in a small amount of time and “somehow you put the pieces back together into a seamless pattern perceived” as one entity, so we should include all elements to know place (Ratey 99). By applying the layers of meaning for place as pieces of a puzzle, place reveals a pattern with characteristics common to other people who experience a similar place in the world. The structure of a cube is my mental vision explaining the form of six common themes, or elements, placed together in a way that shows the possibility of forming a holistic environment. Because the influences upon place originate from a myriad of sources and approach from numerous directions, the type or style of a place might be best understood by thinking about this three dimensional structure. For example, by using the space within a cube to assist in expressing the relatedness among the themes defining the essence of place, the complexity of this structure of place becomes clearer to me. Because “a place is a center of action and intention,” to complete the structure of place we must add a point of reference which represents the one

experiencing” (Relph 42). One spot in the center of a cube will have its defining x, y, z axis and will automatically be closer to some sides than others. These intervals between the person experiencing the place and the side of meaning of that place create a continuum of greater or lesser concentration which can form infinite possibilities when taken together. Whether harmful or helpful, traumatic or restorative, each place leaves an impression upon the person experiencing it. Each person in a specific place has the potential to verbally and sometimes visually explain the effects of that place on their emotions, their senses, and their entire being.

Definitions and Conclusion of Research

When the focus of a person is on place, elements from the place emerge and may adopt a vivid clarity. As the mind is allowed to wander- to observe people, objects, structures, or future possibilities- one notices variations in the quality of an environment. To be fully present in a situation, in a place, makes a person aware of details in the surroundings. Whether completely relaxed or entirely on guard, the person in that place notices and becomes more likely to think about particular aspects of the place and their inherent meanings. When a place touches a person in a special way, the information relating to that place is stored for later recovery and synthesis. A heightened mindfulness of one’s environment seems to be the essence of place. When the brain is stimulated in multiple areas simultaneously, the memory of a place is etched in the back of the mind. To understand exactly what makes *place* an identified entity, the topic must be studied from various angles. In order to focus on the angle through

which we view our world, a place must touch us in some unique way in order to affect us or to be memorable. Most authors would agree that the individual experience of place is inherently visual by design. To express the nature of such an experience of place with language and text might uncover some areas that could be analyzed later. When awareness of a place occurs, the place is experienced and a memory of that place is made.

Being in a *place* means being in a “particular portion of space ... which is marked off by its use or character; being in an area” (Thatcher 632). A place within our historical context, immediate culture, and extended society includes influences from a variety of fields with significant contributions from geography, philosophy, psychology, ecology, education, and the related studies of architecture, design, and planning (Krasner 1). These influences cause people to explain their experiences of place with their own individual perspectives and in their own words. Various authors have explored the meaning of place related to their individualized professional expertise. An individual and his environment develop a “continual, ongoing process of interaction and mutual influence” (Krasner 79). Interaction between man and his environment is illustrated by the observation of the architect Lars Lerup, “We design things and things design us” (156). “It is fascinating to notice when and where during recent history this notion of place has emerged as a strong motif in literature, politics, and popular song. The record synchronizes fairly well with periods of relatively abrupt change either within the social or physical environment or in the world of ideas”

(Buttimer 166). These conceptions and associations of place are also implicitly present in the fundamental *Zeitgeist*, or world view, for any given point in history (167).

Place is also defined as “a focus where we experience the meaningful events of our existence” (Norberg-Schulz 19). By attempting to understand a moment of this interaction, we begin to see more clearly the meaning of place. Because the study of place is necessarily multidisciplinary, social change agents, learning facilitators, and environmental designers are following an interest in the change process in order to address the intricate issue of place for an already complex society (Krasner xii). The experience of place in the human environment is a topic which invites infinite study and analysis. The relationship between place and the individual is an area which offers researchers, especially those involved in phenomenological research, the opportunity to uncover many more insightful details about the multidisciplinary effects of place on an individual.

Recent Focus on Place

Reevaluating the essence of *place* seems to be a rather recent focus for geographers, ecologists, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, theologians, historians, artists, designers, educators, and others who follow the “arrows” that point to the fact that people have deep connections to *place* in their lives. Many current authors have entered the interdisciplinary discussion which seeks to define the significance of our environment in relation to a human life. More precise investigation is warranted to supplement the research already completed

by renowned investigators in each major discipline. The totality of the relationship between a place and an individual can best be understood when results from studies in contributing disciplines are viewed as a whole, with each piece of research playing an important role in ultimate understanding. Only then will the relationship between the environment and the individual present its true self.

Beginning of Personal Experiences

As a person enters a place for the first time, that person must address incoming information and adjust previous expectations. Being in any place for any length of time will bring new experiences and new feelings to an individual. We are affected by a place, and we take “pieces” of the place with us when we leave. Perhaps, by relating my awareness of various places, and my personal experiences in several specific places, I can shed some light upon the elements and themes involved in the human experience of place. Living in a new city and beginning my college career at UT, Knoxville, was not at all like I thought it would be. My unique perspective upon entering this new situation was influenced by the fact that I had been valedictorian of my high school class of 350 and a very active student who did not mind working hard, organizing club functions, or assisting teachers. I had been on the basketball team and the softball team which stimulated and motivated me to work together with a group toward a common goal. One of the first things I noticed about college life was that much of what the college freshman did was on an individual level. Little support was available to help the struggling student carry the burdens of being a freshman, so I became active in (ASID), the student organization that is

associated with the National Association of Interior Designers. From the initial semester, I was also active in student architecture groups. I have never been one to find that making new friends is an easy task, but I “jumped in with both feet” and tried to find my niche in this new place, the UT campus. As anticipation gave way to doubt, I sometimes wondered if I had landed in the right place, but staying busy had gotten me this far. Days seemed long and intense, but weeks sped by much the same as in high school...working on school projects, attending meetings and lectures, eating if I remembered, and staying up later and later to complete everything required for my courses and other obligations.

Two Places of Impact

When I started my freshman year at UT, I wondered what it would be like to choose where to be, what place to be at any given time. I had given no serious thought to what elements contributed to a specific place, what effects a place might have on a person, when a place captures a person’s attention, or why a place touches a person in an emotional way. I had never given much thought to the specific places in which I would spend my time during college. Before long, however, I became very familiar with two specific places on campus - my dorm room and the art and architecture building (A&A). Both my dorm room and the A&A building itself were confining. When I entered the UT college environment, I cherished solitude. My new roommate, and potential friend, was assigned to me by an anonymous process (by someone who obviously did not know me at all). My roommate was an overbearing, obnoxious young woman who had absolutely none of the same interests that I had - and always seemed

to be “in the way.” While I did my best to adjust to being in an enclosed space with her, I found myself dreading the room. We did learn to co-exist in the same space, but we did not become fast friends. In fact, she was so distracting to me that I moved out of the dorm to an apartment after the first semester. In addition to my notion that my first year had not begun on a positive note, another factor contributed to my struggle with the new college experience. Most of my classes the first year were in A&A - what a place! I found the building to be harsh, stark, cold, and dark. That building was the place where I was forced to spend hour after hour- working on drawings and constructing models. Passing through or spending the night, I dreaded going there. Little color existed, only the cold gray of the concrete floors and thick walls. Glimpses of brown desks could be seen if you looked beyond all the lecture notes, library books, presentation boards, drafting tools, model pieces, and vellum rolls piled around the room. Studios, flanked by long rows of windows, brought little light to the individual work spaces. The natural light, divided by cantilevered shelves of space, only bounced off the dull grayness. It highlighted dust on the exposed HUAC system, but did not produce much warmth, either of color or of temperature. Each student, having limited personal space, attempted to store work and life away in one small locker. As students shared midnights shoulder to shoulder, partitions closed in and the building’s majestic planning and design offered nothing inspiring - just open space to separate us. Discussions were common, and I seemed to be the only person who did not enjoy the distraction of voices and music. All sounds carried in the openness, and I could not find any quiet space

when several students were in the studio with me during the week. However, when the building was not so busy, usually on Friday and Saturday nights, it was much too quiet. The building had no movement, and the stillness was like a tomb. Even though I did not enjoy working on my assignments in the A&A building, I really had no choice of where to do my work. My drawings had to be completed on my drafting board with its precise measuring bar, and the drafting board was located there. My lectures, my labs, my study groups, my meals, my naps, my life ... all located in the grayness of "the building." So, instead of having the freedom to work in a place that I found to be conducive to my best work, I found myself spending more and more hours in the drabness, trying to produce what the teachers assigned, but being thoroughly stifled by my surroundings. I could not be effective and productive there. Ultimately, I discovered that a person sometimes must lose a place in order to find it.

Reflections of Past Places

I guess that is about the time that I began to reflect on some of the specific items I had always been surrounded with before I entered college. My early high school years offered places I could go where I could be away and relax. The years I spent in high school gave me places with variety and vitality: sports trips, locker rooms, old gyms, yearbook sessions, grassy fields, social courtyards, and Granny's house. Smells of fried chicken, homemade yeast rolls, and a wood-burning fire always greeted me as I entered my grandmother's house. I vividly remember beautiful pictures on the walls, shades of pink, cream, and cranberry upholstery on the furniture, and an antique oak table in the

kitchen. I had never been exposed to a place as “lifeless” and drab as the A&A. This concrete building was holding me captive. At the time, I did not understand how to analyze the impact that “the place” was having on me, but I did notice feelings of increasing intensity - pressure, panic, agitation, anxiety, worry, determination, even defeat. During the first semester at UT, I was very moody. I had trouble getting started on projects or drawings in that austere environment. The place dictated slumped shoulders, aching knees, sweat pants, and tattered tees. Most other students seemed to survive by leaning on the social aspect of the place, but I felt trapped. I was not at UT to socialize, and I did not see the benefit of spending what little time we had to complete assignments on idle “chit chat.” For this reason, I was often frustrated and was looked on as the person who didn’t want anyone to have fun. The suffering and struggling that I encountered as I moved through that place was extremely traumatic, but necessary. I would learn in my years of going from place to place that my acute sensitivity to stimulation had the potential to inspire and motivate me or to distress and distract me. When I began my college career I started with a major in Interior Design, a major which combined art, history, communication, space planning, and several other areas of interest to me. Since this major put me in the A&A almost constantly, I was exposed to other interior design students who were not like me and seemed to care more about meeting people than meeting goals. This atmosphere was very distracting to me and was not helping me complete my assignments at all. Working faster, longer, and harder did not result in covering more ground. I would stay up later and later working on drawings and

construction of models, with tired eyes and fatigued body, yet I was not able to make substantial progress like I had hoped. I would start over and over again on the same page if I noticed even the smallest imperfection in the width of a line. I began to be frustrated all the time - about everything. I began to think that something was wrong with me since I could not finish many parts of individual assignments in the same time frame as the other students.

Accuracy and Drafting

One of my classes that first term was Design Fundamentals with Dr. Shell. In this course, we learned about proper lettering for documents and project boards. We also learned to do black and white sketches of various perspectives in the Architecture building. I truly appreciated the class, even though it did take a great deal of time to get the lettering and the perspectives just right. Learning this new way of looking at the world, I was challenged to dissect each image into structural components. This extreme level of accuracy that was demanded seemed most prominent during the process of producing an axonometric drawing of a cube of space. The repetition required in this assignment was literally very numbing for me and increased my level of stress and confusion about why the repetitive tasks were so difficult for me. Tasks became more and more tedious and ability to accept and enjoy the assignments decreased. During one of my labs, Dr. Shell told me that I worked too hard to be in Interior Design and that I had too much talent to stay in that major. Whew, did that ever send me into a panic! I wrestled with exactly what his comments meant. I didn't have much experience making important decisions, so I felt very uncomfortable even

considering the possibility of changing my major. Also, it seemed very early to be considering a change in my projected plans for the future. I was not sure that I wanted to be where I was, but doubted that I would like the next place any better. I did not have any answers, but I had plenty of questions. After many lengthy discussions with friends, family, and faculty, I did decide that I would begin the transition to Architecture after I returned to UT in January. As I attempted to deal with challenging classes, changing majors and hunting a place to live away from the dorm, I also found myself dealing with family situations, ones that would affect me profoundly.

Stressful Life Complications

In late September of that 1996, my grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. She lived less than an hour away, in Kingston, Tennessee, and because I was so emotionally attached to her and loved her so deeply, I felt torn. I needed to get my college work done to the best of my ability, but I also felt that no amount of time would be enough to be with my grandmother. I felt like leaving college would make things easier, but I knew that she would want me to stay at school. An additional complication arose from the travel involved in my long-distance relationship with my boyfriend. Daily I struggled with the pull of academics, the pull of family, and the pull of the relationship with my boyfriend. I developed the habit of driving home on the weekends - to see my family (granny, sister, mother, and dad) and my significant other. Initially, I wanted to stay on top and get ahead on campus from Sunday night until Friday afternoon, in order to rest and regroup on the weekend. However, because I did not use my time

wisely on the weekends, I kept getting behind on my assignments and trying to play “catch up” during the week. I was experiencing so many emotions simultaneously that I could not sort out anything well enough to name the source of the problem.

First Creative Project at UT

My creativity had not been tapped at all during my first semester, but there was a unique creative outlet presented during the beginning months of spring term of 1997 - in an architecture class called Design Fundamentals. I faced the creative challenge with many stress factors influencing me and with multiple ideas in my head for the project. These facts contributed to a situation of facing deadlines without ample time to complete everything. As classes moved from charcoal, pencil, and pen drawings to considering a concept for design, my interest was stimulated. While investigating the concept of “transformation,” and the transition between polar opposites, I began to construct a concept model to express this idea. I vividly remember sitting in the living room floor in my grandmother’s house late in the winter of 1997 working intensely on this project. I was able to concentrate and work well with family members around, a cozy fire in the fireplace, and sincere encouragement. The small wooden sculpture that I had designed was my focus when so many things were changing in my life. This small wooden cube stayed the same, just becoming smoother and more beautiful as I sanded the sharp edges and rubbed the wooden surfaces. Designing the six-inch wooden cube of space, learning the skills necessary to navigate and succeed in the wood shop, and presenting the idea during critiques for a theater

project had not been intimidating activities for me. I was excited about what I had created and confident that I could explain every little detail and answer every question. The cube, however, became much more than just an ordinary assignment. This was my first experience with a partner on a college project, as we split the requirements and worked individually. I developed an original 3-D conceptual part while she rendered the 2-D technical portion on paper.

Practical and Detailed Ideas

The idea in my thought process for the full-size theater could potentially be constructed and assembled to open for a performance and to close again for transport to another location if necessary. I did not realize it at the time, but my original ideas actually had great potential to work in reality, but my ideas also involved many details that multiplied exponentially. Therefore, I was not always aware of all the many details until I found myself lost in the middle of a project, trying to complete details I didn't even notice at first. The ideas that I develop in my head rapidly develop into a finished idea or complete plan. Then it seems to me that I have been asked in college to break the final product down into pieces so the teachers can evaluate whether or not my end product is possible to develop. Well, I know most of the time that my project ideas can actually be developed, because the finished piece is already in my head - I can usually "see" the finished project in my head before I even do the first drawing. I have felt many times that my professors were forcing me to tear apart what my mind had constructed, and this has become very disheartening and frustrating to me as a creative person. Throughout my initial barrage of classes, I struggled with

having so many good ideas that I ran out of time to complete assignments to the degree of perfection that I envisioned. I can now admit that I have many perfectionist tendencies. Though not logical or efficient, it seemed to me an absolute necessity to consider every angle and to ponder each possibility in a quest for that one “best” ultimate choice for each project. I found it difficult to continue with an idea that I began to work on if I thought of a better idea later for a project - after I had already started on details with my first idea. I noticed that often I would jump from idea to idea, not really developing any one idea, not being able to stay with just one of my ideas long enough to complete an entire project. I did not realize it at the time, but certain patterns and processes could be explained by Attention Inconsistency. I had followed that pattern in high school - jumping from one idea to another so rapidly that many “projects” were left undone. However, during my time in high school, my mother would finally force me to select which idea to use and would encourage me to continue to move on with it until the project or the paper was finished.

On My Own

How was I going to make those decisions by myself at UT? I realize now that I actually did experience attention problems all during college. Even though some people thought I was being lazy, using tactics of procrastination, or just losing interest, my mother would always tell them that if they just understood me, they would know that I certainly am not a lazy person. Evidently, she “saw” the effort and energy that I expended in my “thought process.” If I could capture and show others the “work” that I do in my head, every day, sometimes all day long,

people might be better able to understand a person like me. It truly is difficult for anyone with attention deficit challenges to “follow through” just because that is what should be done. It has taken me years of learning about why I am the way I am to help me be able to make progress with the basic steps of choosing a topic, making a plan, beginning the project, and actually being able to follow the plan through to completion. Completing a project did not come automatically for me, even though I was willing to do any amount of work required. Projects took me longer, required extra energy (especially mental energy), and demanded lists and lists of what to do when - in order for me to be able to complete and turn in all the steps that teachers required to reach their goal of a completed project. Sometimes I have thought that if a professor would just let me do a project in my own way, without the little steps that “everyone” must go through to get to the finished piece...I would be able to do a complete project in my own way (my own process of getting there). I believe that my project would be just as good as any others that had followed the regular process of being done. I have never been given that chance...to complete a project using my own process without redoing and redoing the beginning steps until I am so frustrated that I can't follow through or continue with it any longer.

Thought Process and Learning Style

Maybe I learn differently than other students; yet, maybe I'm not the only college student that has faced the frustrations that I have faced with my classes. I just know that college has been quite a challenge for me, even though I consider myself to be fairly intelligent. There were no classes that I found to help

the frustrated freshman. I was (and am) a thinker, and I approached all my assignments with much thought and much planning. It was true; however, if a teacher could not see on paper what I wanted to do, I was not allowed to proceed. I was forced to proceed like all the other students...step by step, over and over, perfecting everything as I went along - not being given even the slightest permission to be the tiniest bit creative in my approach or in the process I wanted to use. Maybe colleges should offer a class that would be available for freshmen to take - to allow them to have one place they could think, discuss, plan, and share questions. Maybe some of the struggling students could find some balance between the way they perceived a paper or a project and the way the teacher demanded that they approach the paper or project. If I had been able to talk to other freshmen who were feeling some of the same feelings of frustration I experienced, just talking to them would have immensely benefited me. Most people around me had no idea that a "bright student" could be so frustrated. It almost seemed that some details required by teachers and so easy for most students, were difficult for me. Just as it also seemed that some details required by teachers and hard for most students, were easy for me. Is everything backwards in my head? Are my thought processes different than the thought process of other students in the same classes that I took? How was I supposed to cope with seeing in pictures instead of in steps like everyone else? Most of the teachers that I have had at UT have no concept of the difficulty I confronted in just getting a task started. In actuality, I cared so much about each of my projects that overwhelming tension would periodically paralyze me. The

whole situation of choosing a path, working past obstacles and options, and completing a project by a specific deadline tormented me. How would I to cope with it all?

Pain, Stress, and Escape

I began smoking - to escape for a break, to remind myself to breathe and to help me stay awake during long hours at the A&A studio lab. I also consumed great quantities of coffee instead of eating nutritious foods. Eventually, the lack of sleep, the mounting stress, and the unhealthy habits I had developed began to catch up with me. I became continually tired, cranky, and unable to complete assignments. I had trouble dealing with the fact that my grandmother would die soon, and her death would bring pain to everyone in my family, especially my mother. I held my feelings in, pushed at school to complete what I could, pulled away from my mother so I didn't have to watch her suffer, and turned to my boyfriend and his drinking friends. Looking back now, I see that that what I did was very, very destructive for me; however, at the time I had to have some relief from my pain. [In my recent reading about the specific symptoms that I experienced in college, I have learned that most creative people (many of whom have attention challenges and don't know it) turn to destructive habits to help them deal with the movement of so many thoughts and ideas in their heads.] I was disappointed with myself for not being able to finish the assignments I was given. I felt pain that I had no control over the fate of my grandmother's health or my mother's pain. I felt pain about being so far away from my boyfriend, and I felt so much "pressure" in my head that all I could think of most of the time was relief

from the pressures and stresses. My family was not aware of the habits I had developed to deal with my feelings, so I maintained two personalities - one when I was with them and one when I was away from my family. When my grandmother died in April of 1997, I was devastated. I had looked up to her all my life: she had been an example of the kind of person I wanted to be when I got older...kind, gentle, loving, nurturing, and spiritually wise. Now the grounding I had looked to for so many years was taken away from me. My mother was grieving, so I didn't feel that I could turn to her to help me, so the "answer" that I developed was to take myself even further away from my family and to try to deal with my emotions and the demands of school by myself as best I could. I wondered if any creativity would be able to surface from inside me when I felt so much pain.

New Perspectives, Same Box

Just after my grandmother died, I began to notice that what I was learning seemed to peak my interest again. I began to realize that I was learning to "see" things with a different perspective than ever before. The class that brought this new perspective to my awareness was Human Environment Systems. I began to discover "proxemics." Professor DeLong introduced me to a new idea to me - the fact that people use space to structure relationships to others and to objects in a place. This concept intrigued me immensely, and I did extra reading about the subject. In my analysis and my thought process during that class, I reasoned that if people use space within a place in that way, then people must also take with them something from the places they leave. That semester was the time I began

to put details together in my head about the influences a place had on an individual and the ways the individual responds to the place. I began to learn that various places can affect us in different ways, depending on what experiences we take with us to the place and how we view the place itself. It has been an educational journey for me to learn about "place." My wooden box was the first time I thought about a place while holding something concrete in my hands. Later, as I learned more and more about place, I connected that knowledge to ideas in my head concerning how my box related to place. My small wooden box would become the unifying key in my thought process about place.

My Health

While I was grieving for my grandmother, it helped me to concentrate on my classes and try to learn about the new perspectives that began to evolve in my head. In May of that year, against the advice of my mother, I took calculus during mini-term. I had absolutely no energy; I desperately needed to rest my body and my mind, but I needed the math class. The symptoms of fatigue and inability to focus overtook me again. I was barely able to complete assignments and go to class, but I did finish the calculus course. I paid for that mini-course with my health. I was so tired that I felt I could sleep forever. My mother and I had some interesting discussions about how various places do affect us. We talked about funerals, about being at my grandmother's house, about the drabness of the architecture building, about the boredom of staying in bed day after day, even if you are feeling good. My mother had always been my sounding

board about most topics, yet for years I had thought she was “telling me what to do” when she tell me something. Later, I realized that she was just trying to give voice to some suggestions for me to consider. We disagreed about many areas and many of her “suggestions,” but we still did talk with each other about what was bothering us. Just having her to talk to helped me, but I certainly didn’t tell her that - not then.

More Stress and Grief

After I buried my grandmother in April of 1997, my mother called in July of that same year, to tell me that my grandmother’s best friend for more than forty years had also died. I tried to help mother cope with going through the friend’s estate in Oak Ridge. At the same time, mom was trying to sell my grandmother’s house and settle the estate with her two sisters. I don’t think I was much help to anyone during those times. I was consumed with sadness and very distressed about having signed up for a course in Western Civilization through Roane State Community College in Harriman. I would do the work at home and go to campus to take the tests. Then, in August of that same summer (1997), my sister (who is younger than I by six years) experienced a traumatic event. My sister Emily spent the night with her best friend Lacey before school registration. The following day, the younger girls got up to tell Lacey’s sister good-bye when Alicia left to register for high school. The sixteen-year-old died in a car wreck on the way to register for school. My mother was called to go pick up Emily and Lacey and take them home with her until the dad could pick up Lacey. That August, right before I started fall term of 1997 at UT, I attended the funeral of the sixteen-

year-old who was like family to my younger sister. I ached for my sister. My varying emotions were becoming extremely difficult to deal with, and my classes that fall were even more demanding. However, I had no idea that even more was to happen over Thanksgiving break. I received a phone call at the end of Thanksgiving weekend telling me that a close college friend of mine had been killed on a motorcycle in his hometown. I was stunned. I had often studied with Ben. Several of my UT friends picked me up at my parents' house, and we all went to Clarksville, Tennessee, to Ben's funeral. After the funeral, my entire body, mind, and soul collapsed. I know now that I experienced after that funeral all the pain of all the deaths during the previous eight months - all at the same time. It was overwhelming to me. I did not seem to be able to deal with all that I was experiencing. It was a good thing I had not driven to the funeral. I rode back to Knoxville with my friends and proceeded to become more and more depressed and withdrawn. I talked to my family by phone, but I did not visit often, even though I was in the same town on weekends to see my boyfriend. My world seemed to be falling apart all around me. I certainly did not understand all that had happened in such a short period of time, and I became more and more confused and depressed.

Fall of 1997 - Too Many Deaths

The fall of 1997 was unbearable for me. I missed my grandmother and my friend Ben. I worried about my mother and my sister, each grieving as I was. I tried to focus on my course work, but I couldn't. I began to experience times that I would start crying uncontrollably. I know now that these were panic attacks, but

at the time I thought I was going crazy. I felt totally overwhelmed with all my emotions and all the demands on me from the professors. I would sit in the floor crying, arms locked, rocking back and forth, unable to work on even the shortest assignment. My head felt as if it would explode. I thought about dropping courses because the panic attacks actually paralyzed me and I could not produce any work. I still had ideas for the projects that were assigned, but I was not able to complete much at all of the requirements to be turned in. In the 271 architecture class, I worked on advertisements for Levi's jeans, completing a billboard design, a magazine ad, and a two-dimensional abstraction of the advertisement brackets. Next, I began the concept model for the project. Copper was a material I wanted to utilize in my project as a contrast to the wood in the space, so I built the model and was quite satisfied with how the copper looked as part of my wood design. I could tell that my designing skills were emerging, but again I found myself caught again in the trap of "not enough time" to put all the details into the project that I envisioned. (This concept was for a rest area between Tennessee and North Carolina.) I enjoyed working on it, but was not able to keep up with the pace of the deadlines for parts to be turned in. Since I was not able to complete all aspects for the projects in the two architecture classes, I guess it is no wonder that I withdrew from those two classes that semester. I had experienced such sorrow and so many deaths during a period of eight months that I would not wish those experiences on my worst enemy. My mother suggested that I see a psychologist to get help in dealing with my feelings and the stresses I was under. I did and the psychologist referred me to a

psychiatrist who started me on Paxil, a widely-used antidepressant, to help me function from day to day and become productive again. Over the course of about three months, my body adjusted to the medicine, and I was able to once again complete some class assignments. That term I finished a complicated Internet project for the History of Architecture class, complete with specific picture illustrations from each time period. Even though I did not finish the work for the architecture classes, I felt a sense of accomplishment in the fact that I did finish one class and turn in a two-inch binder filled with what the teacher wanted. There was no creativity at all involved in the class that I did finish, so by spring term of 1998, I felt ready for more challenging assignments again.

Search for Direction

That spring I took an art class working with three-dimensional objects and completed an abstract sculpture using a mirror, copper wire, and marbles. It illustrated the impact of context upon a work of art. I also constructed a small booklet, using hand-made paper. My original booklet contained original poems, quotes, and designs of dried flowers and leaves glued onto the small pages. I was pleased with both these efforts, and it felt wonderful to again be able to see my creativity at work. Prior to that spring term, I had been very careful to sign up for courses that I felt would help me emotionally as well as academically. I felt that, after all I had experienced in such a short time, it would help me if I could be really interested in what I was spending my class time on, so I took general psychology, introduction to mass communications, music and exercise, and a physical education class about the health benefits of walking - in addition to my

studio art class. The variety of activities helped me to begin to feel better mentally and physically, and the basic psychology class even helped me to begin understanding the deep emotions I had experienced during the past year. I was able to complete all my classes that term, and my mother and I discussed which classes seemed to be causing me the most trouble. We discovered that the courses which contained repetitious assignments and required the completion of the same drawing over and over were the courses that I simply could not finish. Again, I had no idea that I was struggling with attention deficit symptoms, so I could not yet "put my finger on" any reasons why I couldn't complete certain types of project assignments. I did not feel good about that - I felt defeated and guilty that I was not "smart enough" to just do my assignments and complete whatever classes I signed up to take. I felt really stressed.

Deteriorating Health. . .Time Away

At the end of spring term, 1998, I had all the symptoms of a bad case of the flu, but I just thought I was tired from all my classes; I knew I was not getting enough sleep. I should have known that something was wrong when I slept through my psychology final. I received a C in that course, even though I had an A before the final. I was too tired to pursue the professor and explain; I just went home to Kingston. Just after I returned home, I was involved in a minor car accident. My mother took me to the emergency room just to make sure that I was O.K. The nurse discovered that I had a fever, so the doctor ordered a test for mononucleosis. Much to my surprise, the test came back positive. I rested all summer and tried to "slow down" my brain. I really felt bad physically. I had no

energy for anything. I didn't even work that summer. My mom urged me to get my health under control before I went back to UT, and I tried to do that. However, this was not easy for me. When I began to feel better, I wanted to get a job or go back to UT and take more classes right away. Why did I have to rest? I don't think I even knew how to rest. Mom was not for either one at first. Finally, we decided if I just worked part time, it might help me get back on my feet more quickly and part time might not be too stressful. So, I went back to work part time at O'Charley's Restaurant in Cookeville and stayed out of college through the fall of 1998 and the spring of 1999. After getting my health issues in order, I planned to return to UT in Knoxville. I instinctively knew that it would be a difficult challenge to return to college after being out so long.

Impressions of Plants and Place

Coming back to UT after being out of college for a year found me in a state of confusion. I had no idea what to expect about my adjustment back to college life. I did not want to take the same type of courses that had caused me so much distress before. Therefore, I made an extra effort to seek out classes that truly interested me. To help me emotionally and academically, I turned my attention to classes that intrigued me and "pulled at me" for fall of 1999. I desperately wanted to spend class time in courses that would help me feel healthy and productive. After registration, I found myself in a class of Interior Landscaping: naming and classifying various indoor plants. In that class, I also was introduced to aspects of various plant sizes, specific plant lighting, and decorative plants used in water fountains. I was definitely intrigued by what I was

learning. This course made such a positive impact on me that I read extra to learn why plants helped people to feel good and work well at their jobs. I felt like I was discovering knowledge that just fit into my beliefs and ideas of what works together to make places beautiful, healthy, and productive. Even the physics class offered facts about motion, energy, and movement that helped me begin to piece together the puzzle in my head about “place.” I wondered, “What makes places unique?” What causes places to affect people in different ways? Can we ever be in control of those effects produced on us by the places? How does movement affect a person in a specific place? How does all this fit together with the other knowledge already in my brain? I was quickly developing many beliefs, thoughts, and overlapping ideas during this semester at UT. At this time I also took a class in the Fundamentals of Interior Design, and I was required to produce a rendering for a loft space of a specific size. We were to use color in an inventive way and design the space in the loft to be functional for the people who might live there. I really enjoyed working on my designs for the space, but again the deadlines caused me great anguish. In order to complete the assignment, I was forced to change my ideas and use less creative ones that did not require so much detail. Personally, I liked my ideas with all the details, and I did not really understand why my detailed ideas could not be utilized in the time frame of my class assignments and their deadlines. I was not aware that my ideas being so detailed and creative might cause a problem in the completion of the task at hand. I was given only a certain amount of time to complete each lab assignment, and I wanted to have more time to develop my best ideas. I

resented the fact that I was being forced to use alter my ideas just to have time to complete each assignment. I made a C in that course, because I could not come to any balance with what was expected of me and the creative, very detailed ideas I desired to explore.

Assignments for Design and Color Theory

By the spring of 2000, I was feeling better physically, and I took a class called Theory of Color. This was an enjoyable class for me and it helped me return to the process of thinking about my major and what kind of job I saw myself in after graduation. During this class, I began to realize how important color is for me in a place. I have always been sensitive to details around me, but especially sensitive to various shades and to certain distinct colors. I also began to realize that different colors, bright ones and softer ones, affect people emotionally. I learned how designers use color to evoke specific feelings in the people who occupy a definite place, and I began to try to see how this might become part of a job I might find myself doing later. I became very interested in analyzing how color affects people and how colors are used inside a building, inside a specific room, and outside the buildings in the landscaping. I thought about the information from this class over and over in my mind. At this time, I also was taking Fundamentals of Interior Design and learning about the texture, grain, and color of wood, marble, granite, tile, and other materials used for indoor and outdoor spaces. One assignment which I completed for this ID class was to reproduce by hand an interior place as it appeared in a magazine: a large stuffed chair, a small side table, and a small lamp. Each of these small

renderings was completed using a different medium, and they immediately helped me see that my creativity was still within me. That project was one of the best ones I had done in college, and it helped me to have more hope that I could complete a major and finally get a college degree in design, even though I had missed a whole year of school due to health reasons. I also completed a class in Western Art that semester and took another mini-term class called the Social and Economic Impact of Plants. I learned more details about botany and the many uses of plants in the business world. Again, my creativity seemed to be stirring inside me, and my thoughts dwelt on plants and place, color and place, temperature and place, indoor places, outdoor places, and all types of generalizations of what I was learning. My mind became a maze of *thoughts, ideas, and possibilities* for new classes and future activities that interested me and “pulled” at me. I began to understand more about the details that surround a person in a place, and I was fascinated once again and eager to take more classes that related in some way to place and the relationship between an individual and place. I wanted to choose classes carefully for the fall so I could benefit from many of the new ideas I began to explore.

Construction Documents and Panic Attacks

By fall, I was ready to see what else I could learn about sorting out the numerous ideas in my head. I took Textiles, History of Interior Design, and a six-hour class called Intermediate Interior Design. The ID class with the extensive lab time again affected me in a very negative way. The class included extensive explanation and practice in the preparation of construction documents. When

the class first began, I was able to keep up and turn assignments in on time. However, as the class continued and the assignments required that I redo drawings that I had just finished constructing, I noticed pressure building in my head. I didn't know it at the time, but my panic at the repetitive assignments was another symptom of attention and focusing challenges that I hadn't realized I was dealing with. My head felt like it would explode, and I began to have panic attacks. I did not understand myself at all. I knew that I was fairly intelligent and had some talent...so why couldn't I complete these drawings and turn them in? Negative thoughts began to pour into my head, and I started feeling very bad about myself. There was no creativity in my work at all during this semester. The other two classes were also like the construction documents class - the teacher telling us what to do, with no creative outlets provided at all. The frustration was almost unbearable for me. I finally did complete the complicated History of Interior Architecture class and did produce an acceptable two inch binder of Internet sources, including articles and pictures related to various aspects of Interior Architecture. However, I was not able to complete the course in construction documents. I just was not able to finish what was assigned, because I was drawing the same thing over and over and over - just to correct minor slants in a line, or minor spacing issues. None of the drawings were ever considered good enough; students received no positive feedback - only negative comments. I found that I could not survive unless I felt some sense of accomplishment. I finally dropped the class and did not plan to take it again.

First Paintings

In the spring of 2001, I was able to take another Studio Art class and get a feeling for using acrylic and oil paints. I also found myself in the second level of Interior Plantscaping and Fundamentals of Landscape Design. Wow...three classes that would allow me to be creative, and all at the same time. I was ecstatic! My fourth class that term; however, did not allow me to be creative at all, and my grade in Business Principles and Practices was at the mercy of my outdated laptop that I had purchased when I first started college. The professor in the architecture class was not a UT graduate and would offer the class new ideas and perspectives for that semester. Students were excited to have the opportunity to interact with someone who was from another part of the United States; we hoped that we would learn from her and she might learn from us. I connected with this professor right away and was captivated by her experiences in the use of green architecture in Houston and other places. While I did the best I could with the individual assignments and with my computer, the class was not one that I managed very well. I failed the class because I could not get my computer to print out the images I had screened into it. I found out later that my laptop had not been equipped to handle what was assigned. When I took the class, I didn't know that, and the teacher didn't seem to care about my computer problems. She only cared about whether or not the computer would print out my assignments. Even though I received a grade of "F" that semester, I knew that I would make an A or B when I took the course later. I also realized that the teacher had genuinely shared a great deal of valuable information with me that

might relate to other classes later. Even with the overwhelming disappointment of the computer class, I did manage to produce some interesting creative assignments in my other classes that semester. Some of my best painting was done during that spring, 2001. In the class called Introduction to Studio Art, I produced a six-foot acrylic painting using vibrant colors of blue, red, yellow, and green to depict water, wind, fire, and nature. I also completed a three-paneled acrylic work depicting my youth, my beginning college years, and my last few years at UT. After completing my first landscape drawings that semester, the final products illustrated to me that I must have some talent to produce what I was producing. I was absolutely amazed at what I was able to do in the classes which allowed me to make creative choices within the assignments. During this term at UT I really learned about my talents and what types of activities were productive for me. By comparing the classes that stimulated me to produce relatively good work with the classes I had been unable to finish, I began to learn even more about myself and the specific challenges that I was forced to deal with...related to attention and focus.

Design Workshop Opportunity

During the spring term, 2001, I saw a flyer in the A&A about a design workshop in Kansas, and I mentioned the workshop to my mother. She has always encouraged me to pursue activities that interested me and would help my education, and she was sure that I should go to the workshop that summer. I passed off the thought of attending the workshop, and finished up my classes. However, my mom was at home using the Internet, learning the details (and the

cost) of the Kansas workshop. One weekend when I was home in Cookeville, my mom said she had registered me for the Kansas Design Workshop and I should start getting ready mentally for the twelve-hour days I would be spending in the workshop. I really couldn't believe she was serious about my going, because it would cost \$1,000 for me to go. However, after many discussions, mom and I decided that she would go with me to help drive the 1,600 mile round trip. Neither she nor I had ever been to Kansas, and we saw an opportunity to enjoy the travel in addition to getting me to the workshop. I continuously thought about the workshop - I worried about how good my work would be compared to that of the other participants - I worried about whether or not the instructor would think I had any talent at all - I was concerned if I would even be able to finish the assignments at the workshop, since I had experienced so many assignments which I couldn't complete. About two weeks before I was to leave on the trip, I told my mom that I had decided that I couldn't go to the workshop. She knew that I was scared about being able to complete all the work, but she would not let me back out. She told me that I was going, no matter what. Needless to say, I was petrified about what would be expected from me at the workshop. My self confidence had never been at a very high level, and I feared that I would be totally embarrassed and not able to do the high-caliber work that might be expected. I asked myself questions like, "What if I don't have enough creativity inside to be able to do the assignments?" I even wondered if the assignments would allow for individual creativity, or would they all look the same, as they had in some of the architecture classes I had taken. Experiencing fear of total failure,

fear of actual achievement, fear of unknown expectations, fear of being with my mother on a trip for twelve days - all this overwhelmed me as I packed. I actually dreaded going by the time we pulled out of our driveway on July 7, 2001. I wondered what I had gotten myself into. It would not be very long before I would discover the answer to that question.

In Kansas

The trip took us almost two entire days to drive, and we were exhausted when we got to Kansas. The thirty-five participants had already been given a schedule of the workshop, but we really did not believe that our working days would actually be 10 - 12 hours per day. We were enlightened quickly...as we found ourselves seated at long tables with the art and design supplies we had brought with us. The instructor initiated us with a rendering assignment our first hour there. We all introduced ourselves and began to work, spread out at even intervals at the conference tables. Many of the students and teachers were architecture majors or instructors and represented about twenty different states. As it turned out, I was the only participant from Tennessee. The work was difficult at first, because I did not understand what expectations the instructor had for each of us individually. Knowing that my confidence level was not very high when I arrived, I became tremendously apprehensive about completing an assignment. I had no idea how I would be critiqued - all I had in my memory bank was the memory of critiques in UT labs, when all our mistakes were pointed out one by one, and nothing positive was offered to us. I really dreaded my first critique from this well-known architect and graphic designer. What would

he say to me; would I be able to handle what he said? I tried my best to do as well as I could...but the butterflies in my stomach and the long hours that we sat at the tables did not help me be calm or confident. I knew that I truly feared the criticism that would come; however, I was hearing far less criticism of the type I was accustomed to. This workshop offered comments on line, color, shading, thickness of the paint, edges, etc. not just phrases such as, "Do that over," or "you could work on those lines at the horizon." My first actual critiques came from TA's after I quickly completed three renderings of specific buildings shown to us. Since I wasn't sure exactly what the instructor expected, I was able to work on the renderings without extreme anxiety. As one of the TA's came around to each participant, I heard such comments as, "these lines are not strong enough, use a little more water here, nice grass color." The TA didn't say anything at first when he came to my table; he just looked at my work. Finally, the TA said, "you have a really good eye for edges...how did you get this color that you used next to the sky?" I explained my process for coming up with the shade I devised by mixing my colors. "That's a really unusual and effective color," commented the TA. I was astonished, because I felt my work was mediocre. Most of our assignments at the workshop had deadlines of fifteen, thirty, or forth-five minutes. The way the workshop was set up, I was not given days to agonize over what to do first. I was forced to just put marker, pencil, or brush on the paper and produce. Our tasks included thin and thick lines, quickly-sketched buildings, careful examinations of color, and quick renderings of plants and building exteriors. Completing work quickly was a wonderful new experience for me. It

seemed so strange...to finish a small rendering in less time than I would have previously just decided which color to start with. It made me feel strangely in control. Just to be attending the workshop was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I vaguely began to realize that I would later cherish the days spent with Mike Lin in Kansas.

Workshop Motto

“Be loose” was the motto of Mr. Lin for the entire workshop. He would show us exactly how he completed a rendering in thirty minutes or less. All of us marveled at his ability to produce the quality work he did - in such a short time. I had always struggled to complete my tasks in days, not in hours. Mike Lin explained to us that the talent and creativity was inside each of us, and all we had to do was channel our talents and create...just let it out...just do what we knew to do, and not be so analytical about the process. There was the “hang up” for me...I had always analyzed every assignment, every drawing, every project I worked on. How could I exist if I wasn’t supposed to analyze anything as I worked on it? However, since my parents paid so much for me to attend the workshop, I tried the technique of just doing it. I fought the desire to analyze each line and every stroke. I found this to be tremendously difficult...not analyzing my work as I did it...Later it did become somewhat easier, though, the more I tried to rid myself of the analyzing. I knew that this would be a battle for me long after I returned to Knoxville after the workshop. Analyzing had been a unique part of my personality as long as I could remember. Could I ever analyze

less as I painted or produced drawings? I truthfully didn't know, but I was determined to put forth an honest effort.

The Rendering Assignment

Another assignment that every participant completed was a watercolor rendering of a barn. All participants worked on this for about forty-five minutes. After everyone was finished, we pinned up our renderings in front of the room for the class to see. Volunteer participants critiqued the renderings, telling what was well done and what was not done so well. The renderings were narrowed to the best two. The two watercolor renderings looked intriguing in front of the room - similar in most ways, but different in a few distinct ways. I was totally shocked that my rendering was one of the two that the class was discussing. (Our names were not on the front of the renderings, so only the other person and I knew that the comments applied to us). I heard, "wonderful choice of colors, exceptional blending of shades; notice the unique color used here along the edge of the grass, notice the edges of the colors...Do we all agree that this rendering is the best one in the class?" Never in my wildest imagination had I even once considered that my work might get any sort of award while I was at the workshop. My stomach was churning, and my legs felt weak as I was called to the front of the room to accept the certificate for Best Watercolor for the 2001 Mike Lin Design Workshop.

Symptoms of Attention Deficit

I must comment on one of the most difficult parts of being at this specific graphic workshop and having to work for extended periods of time. If I had

known before the workshop that I did have attention deficit disorder, it would have been easier for me to accept the fact that my personal duration of working on a task was not nearly as long as the period of time most of the other participants could work. It was upsetting to me to watch others work hours at a time without getting up, and know that I could not make myself focus on just one area for longer than forty-five minutes. Each task was described for me, and I did not have to decide exactly what would fulfill the criteria for the assignment. This helped me to get started. I was able to accomplish what I was told to do, even though I did not understand how I was able to complete the tasks in the company of so many awesome students and teachers. Of course, I was intimidated by all these other people, most of whom were older and more experienced than I. There were only three other students there who had not graduated from college. These personal observations made me almost sick to my stomach, even though I was accomplishing what was assigned. My feelings fluctuated from guilt, to acceptance, to disappointment, to amazement, to questioning, to unbelief as I struggled to understand my creative process.

Significant Discussions

During the trip to Kansas and back, my mom and I discussed the types of classes I had recently been taking and the ones I planned to take in the future. The classes illustrated my wide range of interests, and we discovered that classes from the last two terms seemed to be related to each other in various ways. My choices had gravitated toward four areas of interest: (1) plantscaping-interior and exterior, (2) art - drawing and painting, (3) psychology - self and

experience, (4) design - architectural and interior. It was amazing and interesting to me that the classes I had chosen fell into one of these four groups. I couldn't understand reasons for this as we discussed my classes, but I hoped I would discover why I had formed the groupings that I had. My mom and I enjoyed the time we spent on the trip, and she spent part of the trip encouraging me and reiterating to me how talented she felt I was. This is another area in my life that I have always struggled with. I did not "feel" talented; I cannot explain how I can render or paint what I do, and I have difficulty when my work is complimented. How can an artist produce very creative and unique work and accept that the work is good without appearing to be too proud? I planned to seek an answer for that when I returned from the trip to Kansas.

New Directions, New Paths

We were absolutely worn out when we got back from the workshop. Four days of driving and seven days of sitting at the workshop did things to my body I had not envisioned. My neck and back hurt, and my legs ached. I think I might have slept for two days straight after we returned. After getting back from Kansas, I was glad to be away from the continuous production of work, but I cherished all the memories and all the valuable information I brought back with me. Attending Mike Lin's Design Workshop was one of the most defining learning experiences for me as a designer. I began to think and perceive in a new way, interpreting for myself what I wanted to include in my creations. It would be easier for me to connect thoughts in my head about my college major and to search UT for the person who could help me develop a degree in design

that incorporated my areas of interest. While I was at the workshop in Kansas, I spoke with two other students who had created their own curriculum at specific colleges and had graduated. I had asked people at UT in years past about such a degree, but I had never found anyone who knew if UT, Knoxville, even offered that kind of degree option. After my Kansas trip, I was determined to track down someone who could help me graduate from UT by using the classes I had taken and had planned to complete in the four fields (art, design, plants, and people) that interested me. I finally found Dr. Greenburg in the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department, Dr. Pollio in the Experimental Psychology Department and Dr. Tandy in the Classics Department. It had taken me three years to find people in University Studies, College Scholars, and in Phenomenological Research who could guide my endeavors. I told them about my path with its detours and discoveries that had led me to them. After explaining what I desired from my classes and my interests, the College Scholars Program was visible to me for the first time. I was elated, relieved, scared, and apprehensive, all at the same time. Finally, I had found what I had been looking for...now I just needed to complete the requirements of the College Scholars Program.

Environmental Design and Aesthetics

I was actually eager to begin classes in the fall of 2001 - even if home base would be a friend's couch temporarily. Feeling invigorated from the workshop, I was able to begin classes with renewed hope that all the classes I had "put together" in my head actually could work together to give me the knowledge needed for a college degree in Environmental Design. That

semester, I managed to feel proud of my efforts, a rare occurrence, knowing that I had not given up on finding a program to help me obtain a design degree. I received Ornamental Horticulture credit for the Kansas workshop, because the teacher, Professor Menendez, had also attended a workshop by the same instructor and, therefore, understood the amount of work that I had completed. I was excited that my request for credit had been honored. Specific classes that faced me included two philosophy courses: Environmental Ethics and Aesthetics and one other course, a survey of Horticultural Therapy. After being at the Kansas workshop, I found it somewhat difficult to ease back into the world of college lectures, assignments, and grades. These new classes, however, were constructed to convey intellectually challenging material for assimilation and they actually did relate to my chosen direction. These classes contributed to the realization that I now understood - the combining of related classes into a curriculum that would lead to graduation in design was going to be challenging and quite enjoyable. Interpretations of art during discussions on aesthetics captured my interest in every meeting. It was also enticing to discuss information from a class about ethical responsibility, learning not only to protect and appreciate our environment, but also learning to transform it. Ecology, nature, reverence, color, creativity, uniqueness... all these were connected that semester in my thoughts.

Distraction vs. Focus

My mind was extremely busy ...but it was a positive and constructive type of "noise" in my head. The static interfering with basic cognition caused simply

running an errand to become a complex process for me. It was as if a slide projector was set to constantly shift at random from idea to idea in my thoughts. I began to dissect this mental dilemma by naming its individual parts. One of many visions that I held onto for personal explanation for myself was of a cluster of balloons being gripped in an attempt to separate them in a storm. Being in control of multiple items moving in many directions simultaneously was an ongoing endeavor for me in my thought process. As I progressed in college and gained more and more knowledge, the less capable I began to feel about “holding onto” all the balloons (thoughts, ideas) at the same time. Daily I was being confronted on all sides by the responsibility to keep my head clear enough to be able to plan and complete a project, while at the same time, making sure that I didn’t lose the overall vision that was in my head. My greatest challenge was set before me. For the past year, I had been planning a proposed curriculum in my head, and now I had received the chance to prove that my interests that overlapped in a meaningful way *did* fit together - like a puzzle. I finally heard a respected authority figure say that I had a legitimate curriculum with a legitimate goal for my future. The encouragement was an amazing boost and lifted my spirits with much needed motivation after years of wondering and waiting for a door to open.

Sharing My Creative Process

Spring semester of 2002 came quickly. I would use better equipment to repeat the class in Business Principles and Practices and prove to everyone and to myself that I was not as stupid with computers as it first appeared. Graphic

Design for Architects and Environmental Sociology would offer me special challenges. My mind overflowed with ideas and connections for the kinds of projects that I could be a part of and the kinds of discussions I could be involved in. For the Graphics Design class, the first project involved the design and print out of a magazine article on Frank Lloyd Wright and the types of architecture for which he was known. After I completed that assignment, I turned my energies to my other classes, completing my Business Principles and Practices with an "A" - just like I knew I could with a different computer. I also became completely immersed in the Advanced Topics in University Studies, a class that explored various aspects of the creative process. This class helped me combine the thoughts and beliefs that I had accumulated and sorted in my mind, especially while I was in Kansas. For about a year I had sought out classes that related to my interests and to each other in some way. The creativity class helped me categorize what I had been thinking about the curriculum I was creating in my mind. The class offered me a springboard of ideas to digest and assimilate into my already complicated accumulation of puzzle pieces. I began to realize that creativity had become a dimension of Spirituality for me. I realized that my creativity released an exhilaration which I had not been able to experience in any other way. Thinking back on the paintings I had completed in the spring of 2001, I began to realize that my creativity was a distinct part of who I was, even when I was not producing a visual piece. I also realized that I am "creating" in my head all the time, even if I am not able to verbalize to anyone about the process taking place in my brain. I began to appreciate my creativity and I began

to feel that without my creativity, I might wither and die inside. During this class about creativity, I was able, for the first time, to write about my personal creative process:

When creativity is not fully known, it can never be truly missed. Once realized, however, creative potential continues to draw an individual upward and outward. The energy, which spirals within, can touch others in a way that is still little understood. Finding that full immersion in the present, the here and now, we are forced to lose our self-conscious selves. Performing this activity, transforming nothing into something, somehow gives birth to freedom. This freedom, when nourished, can develop and grow into something phenomenal. In the very process of not thinking about who we are, we might discover who we have become. Our greatest selves and our greatest contributions can only be fully realized when surrender becomes a way of life.

I began to realize that I faced a huge choice for my life. I faced the burden of awareness, once a person knows and understands the place where he is, this person must decide if that place is the place for him to stay. I realized that some people finally reach a point when they must leave a place because that is the right thing to do for them. That was the dilemma in which I found myself. I had to leave the "place" I had been in, the relationship I had been in for seven years. The place was no longer the right place for me to be. I had realized that a relationship can be a "place" with the same effects on a person as a physical place. And, finally, I was able to write about my feelings. For me to be able to write about my personal creativity or of the process for that class was an

incredible experience. It had been impossible for me to share any personal experiences on paper until I was in the class on Creativity. At that time, I was realizing that my past five years had enveloped me in discovery. Even though I could barely detect direction or progress during those five years, I had begun to see how each step led to the next and I began to have a basic idea of the structure that transpired. After that extended process of personal searching, I was ready to rediscover the confidence I had lost so willingly. I decided that an artist must first give up opinions and beliefs in order for things to crumble, to be lost, to be found, and to be rebuilt in a way that is stronger and more beautiful than before. The past five years for me at that time had been a true struggle and had involved some questionable choices, but I felt that the decisions and the obstacles were "meant to be" so that I could learn and grow. The unique culmination of experiences in my life became a culmination that involved the challenging task of re-creating myself. While school always brought with it an element of stress, factors from my personal environment had produced greater effects on me just before taking the class on Creativity.

For months before the class, I had been adjusting to the pain and freedom of a changing, dissolving relationship. I was no longer seeing the man who had been a part of my life for many years. Redefining myself, not as a girlfriend, high-school sweetheart, or half of a couple involved many elements. I made choices, finally, with a calmness that only the winds of time had brought to me. I could really, for the first time, see myself as a human with the heart of a poet, the eyes of an artist, and the mind of a teacher. For the first time, I saw

myself as an individual with thoughts, dreams, and goals of my own. I had a distinct image in my head of my life being a dance. No one would, or could, tell me the steps. As I fumbled to improve, I received help, but no rules ... riddles when I requested answers. I had to try and to fail, to fall and then get up, be timid or be daring - but each choice was my own. I now understood that there is a time to question, a time to commit, a time to step back, and a time to look closer. Finally, I could look and really see - I felt the music and the movement and the rhythm that would carry me on to another place. I no longer felt pushed by the crowd, because I was beginning to learn to flow - to highlight my unique desires by integrating them in a creative solution. I then understood, after all the fighting, darkness, chaos, and confusion...that the beauty of life was in the creation of the next step and in the ability to reflect on that creation by appreciating the details. True identity, for me, was only to be found by searching for and discovering the essence of creativity. Creative outlets began allowing me to see the complexity, the turmoil, and the beauty in my mind - a mind that had been stifled in the past by people who did not understand and did not want to understand. The flexibility that I had finally found helped to make individual pieces of the puzzle in my head more visible to me. I came to the conclusion that openness to opportunities and release from the past would allow me the freedom of new beginnings. I was free to step from one place to the next in my life.

Boston Conference

My second trip to an influential teaching conference was made the second week of May, 2002. My mom and I traveled to the "Learning and the

Brain” conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The conference was an interdisciplinary forum for neuroscientists and educators to collaborate and to present the latest findings on brain research and implications on learning. Speakers included physicians such as Dr. John J. Ratey, who is the well-known author of A User’s Guide to the Brain and co-author of Shadow Syndromes and Driven to Distraction. All the speakers I heard reinforced my suspicions that I definitely had experienced symptoms of adult ADD. Dr. Ratey actually confirmed in his speech “Perception and Attention” that it is not unusual for an intelligent college student to find out that he or she indeed suffers from Attention Deficit Disorder. Since Dr. Ratey was a Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, I accepted the fact that he knew what he was speaking about. I was in disbelief that I was finally discovering the name for all the challenges and confusion I had faced in college. This conference allowed me to accept the brain I had been born with and let me know that I would be able to learn coping skills to help me accomplish anything I set out to do. Filled with newly acquired knowledge, I was eager to begin my classes for the summer and fall.

Phenomenology and Painting

During summer of 2002, I took Psychology 482 and discovered the type of research called phenomenological research. I discovered how this type of research was used to enhance the deeper meaning within similar situations across boundaries. I began attending a discussion group composed of students working on specific graduate projects that used phenomenological research to

enhance their work. The group and the research both were new and exciting experiences for me. First of all, I had not been aware of this type of research, and it thoroughly intrigued me. Also, I enjoyed interacting with the intellectual students and professor. I began to learn about an area that was totally unfamiliar to me; this was motivational. I was also enthused about the classes I had before me for fall, 2002. I would complete the Graphic Design in Architecture that I had previously dropped, and I looked forward to a great experience with the painting teacher in Watercolor 215. I would also continue with the Supervised Research in Psychology by exploring more phenomenological research with the weekly discussion group. I immediately became captivated with the assignments in the watercolor class; I held onto every word and every explanation my instructor spoke. Having seen paintings the professor had completed, I was aware of what an exceptional artist she was. I wanted to learn everything - all at once. I found myself able to launch into the type of painting she wanted me to do, even though I had never taken a real watercolor course before. I had been exposed to watercolor painting in Cookeville when I was eleven; I attended a class with senior citizens one summer. Everything else I knew about watercolor came from within me. The teacher commented on my use of color and shading, and she also asked me how much painting experience I had with the type of work we would be doing in the class. There was not much to discuss about my experience. Sometimes I don't know how I "know" something - I just know. I've been that way all my life - figuring out how to do something on my own, just by trying what works and what doesn't work. My friends considered me weird just

because I was able to do things like that all through school. I am not always able to verbalize the things I know how to do, and I don't always know exactly how I learned some of the specific knowledge I have in my head. I absorb a tremendous amount of what I see; I analyze what I see, and this enables me many times to actually be able to do something that I have not been taught to do. This is another aspect of myself that even I don't understand.

That semester I was continuing with the phenomenological research group and attempting to stay caught up on my watercolor paintings which were due quite regularly. All throughout my college career, I have never been satisfied with any of my projects, and I found it difficult again this semester to deal with the stress. There evidently is a part of me, somewhere within, that wants to work on a project or an assignment until I know it is *perfect*. Of course, I realize that this is not possible in a real world, or in the world of college classes. Yet, I have not yet been able to rid myself of the feeling that if I just spent five more hours on something, it might be better. This was the familiar challenge I faced while completing the architecture design class - depicting the rest area just as I saw it in my mind, completing all assignments, and doing this within the constraints of the project deadlines for the class. Even though I experienced struggle after struggle with the class assignments, with the deadlines for the classes, and with personal situations I had never before experienced in the fall of 2002, I did finally turn in most assignments that were due. Ironically, in the class I had felt most comfortable with and the class I seemed to be making the most progress in (watercolor painting), I was not able to turn in all my assignments by the end of

the fall semester. The reasons for this are uniquely complicated, yet in their uniqueness they relate to my perception of place and how drastically place can affect someone.

A Traumatic Experience of Place

In order for the reader to understand the totality of my perceptions of place and how place relates to and affects the individual, I must describe one specific personal experience that took place October 31, 2002 through November 2, 2002. The man I had been dating for eight months had begun talking to me about the possibility of marriage. We had been close friends for over five years, but had both been in other long-term relationships. After we each decided to end our long-term relationships with our significant others, we began dating each other. Our dating felt so natural and so refreshing. We shared long discussions on all sorts of topics and felt close very quickly since we were already good friends. Travis had gone to Key West, Florida, on October 27, 2002, and was calling me every night. We discussed our eight months of dating and the fact that we wanted to spend all our time together. Were we going to get married? We did talk about that; he even invited me to come to Florida while he was there and possibly get married within a few days. Evidently, I was having trouble processing all that was taking place in my life at that time, because I decided not to go to Florida. I talked to Travis for about two hours each night for the first three nights he was in Key West. Then, a girlfriend of mine called from Chattanooga on October 31 and asked me to come down and “hang out” with her. I hadn’t seen her since she moved several months earlier,

and on a “whim” I got in my car and drove to see her in Chattanooga. My mom said later that I must have been “running away” from the decisions I was facing at that time in my life. I’m not sure why I went, but I would later truly regret my decision to go to Chattanooga. I will never know exactly why I left my safe place and ventured into the unknown of an unfamiliar place in an unfamiliar city.

Consequences

My assumption of our “hanging out” was that we would watch some movies at her apartment and talk; however, she had other ideas for us. We went out with her friends, and I was sexually assaulted on the way back to her apartment. What a difficult lesson I had to learn about poor choices and inevitable consequences. As difficult as it was, I “pulled myself together” as best I could the next morning and immediately drove back to Knoxville. I drove to a friend’s house and told her what had happened; she took me to the hospital and asked if she should call my family. After my friend dropped me off at my apartment, my mother called before I could decide whether or not to call her. She could tell by the way I sounded that something traumatic had happened since we had last talked, so she drove from Cookeville to Knoxville and was at my apartment in just a few hours. Over the next several hours and days, we cried and talked over exactly what had happened. Yes, I had made poor choices. It all seemed like the worst nightmare that anyone could have imagined. Had it really happened? Yes, I knew it had, because I felt so guilty and dirty - like it was my fault. I have never been so traumatized and humiliated. What could I do to make all this go away? The trauma I felt was very real. Would my boyfriend still

love me? How would I be able to complete my art assignments for the semester? There were too many questions with no answers. My family was very supportive, but each day now seemed like all the other days. My boyfriend called from Florida, and he, too, could tell that something traumatic had happened. After talking to me, he flew back to Knoxville a day early to be with me. He was the support I so desperately needed. He and my family were wonderful, and they helped immensely. I soon went for counseling to have someone to talk to who might offer me some answers and suggestions of how to cope with what I had experienced. I could not even think about the paintings that were due for my watercolor class. As it would turn out, it would take me almost a year to complete the paintings for the class. I needed time to heal. Getting on with my life was not so easy now. The transformation of going from one place to the next place now took on an entirely new complexity. Should my boyfriend and I still get married as we had planned? I wasn't sure about anything except that my life as I had known it had been turned upside down. Over the weeks of Christmas break that year, I did extensive soul searching. What was I going to do? How could I get past this? I struggled to find answers to my questions and to find myself again.

Hope and a New Place

Travis gave me an engagement ring on Christmas Day, 2002, and we were married on 01-02-03 at Whitestone Inn, outside of Kingston, Tennessee. Perhaps getting married so soon was not the best choice, but it seemed to help me cope with everything. Travis offered me safety, acceptance, and love. Sexual trauma is difficult to deal with for a woman, and acceptance is vital. Travis and I

have discussed the places I put myself in and the effects those places had on me. We have been married for almost a year and a half now, and I have finally been able to turn in all the late assignments to complete all my classes for fall of 2002.

It took a long time for me to be able to concentrate long enough to work on any of the late assignments. Writing was difficult, sorting out my thoughts was laborious, and painting seemed impossible. I worried that I would not find the focus to complete the watercolor class, and that fact really tormented me. Of all my classes, that class would bring me the most satisfaction to finish. Finally, after about nine months, I began painting again. The most difficult of the assigned watercolors to complete was a self portrait I had begun before the trauma. I truly didn't think that I would ever be able to finish it, but after months and months of trying, I was able to finish it. The painting was so dark and haunting...just like the place it happened. The eyes of the person in the painting were vacant, yet they offered the essence of an experience in a specific place. As I completed that particular piece, I found myself dealing with questions like, "How much a part of a place is a person who has experienced the place?" "Is the degree to which a place touches a person something that the person can control?" After finally completing all the pieces for the watercolor class, it felt really wonderful to have the "incomplete" off my record. It felt good to have been able to apply myself and produce something creative in my life. It felt good to walk past the bad experience to better experiences and to other places. Yes, it is

true that I would never be the same, but who of us is the same as we were yesterday? I was in a new place again.

Senior Project for College Scholars

Trying to complete my Senior Project for the College Scholars Program has been an uphill journey. Almost every step of the way, going from place to place, I have struggled. Creativity for me was directly related to my personal experiences, and I was not able to express my creativity every time I wanted to or needed to. Each place I occupied, each place I saw, each place I experienced gave to me new perspectives. One aspect of my College Scholars Project that I struggled with was the research I did on *place*. Working on that paper during this past August, September, October, and November took me back to the UT library and almost overwhelmed me with too many people and too many quotes and too many ideas to assimilate. I had just been diagnosed by a UT psychiatrist with “Attention Deficit Disorder” in June of 2003, and I was just beginning to adjust to what that meant to me as a college student. I know now that learning coping skills for attention challenges while doing college-level research is not advisable. To deal with my attention challenges, I needed to focus on changing specific behaviors and learning new coping skills. However, I found my focus stretched to the maximum while I worked on the research about place. Finding the best books about place from various authorities in many fields was a challenge in itself. Gathering all the sources, sorting and categorizing the material, and beginning the research seemed monumental to me. I read for weeks and wrote for weeks. Then I typed for months. After concentrating on the

research for four months, I turned in the paper and put my effort toward reaching the new place of being a college graduate. Anxious to reach that next place in my life, I then tackled this paper about my college experiences and what process I have followed to arrive at my concept of place. Working on this final paper has involved revisiting places and reevaluating lessons of my years in college. Some of the revisiting has been exciting for me; some of it has been painful. For my Senior Project to be complete, however, I felt that I was compelled to include a compilation of personal experience, environmental context, and chronological spectrum. I needed to acknowledge to myself and to the reader that my creativity lives on inside me, despite some of the situations I was faced with in the past. I am certain that creativity never really dies in a creative person, even though creativity might seem to be dead. With the right influences, the right stimulation, and the right attitude, a person's creativity can come to life once again.

Endings, Challenges, and Potential

One of the most difficult and challenging aspects I have found in completing any particular project is to just stop working on it and turn it in. I am finding the same feelings and reactions in the completion process of this paper concerning place research, college courses, and personal experiences. Even though I realize that this paper could not possibly contain every thought, every feeling, and every experience of my years at UT since, I still struggle with whether or not the paper will express to the reader all that I desire to share. During my journey, I have noticed a tendency to analyze each place in relation to the amount of time spent there. I have noticed which details of a place

influence me the most. I have absorbed the impact of each place, and I have continued to learn about the implications and contributions for my life.

Completing this paper will be quite an accomplishment for me. After all the time I have spent in college, I feel that it would be impossible to produce on paper the immense amount of knowledge I have accumulated. I have obtained knowledge from the courses I took, but I have also absorbed knowledge about myself and my surroundings along the way. I am not the same person who began UT in the fall of 1996. I certainly do not “see” through the same eyes that I had that first year on campus. My perceptions about almost everything in life have changed during my journey, yet I already know that these perceptions could be challenged again and again.

I retain pieces of every place that I encounter. The way I assimilate those pieces in my life is unique, and I wouldn't want it to be any other way. I am who I am, and I'm a product of every place I have ever lived in, visited, or experienced. I will continue my journey by learning more every year about place and the individual. I will never stop moving from place to place and will always be stimulated by the place in which I find myself. Going from place to place is exciting for me, and I look forward with eager anticipation to experiencing an even wider variety of places in the future. I am open to new ideas and new opportunities, and I will take with me my personal concept of the essence of place.

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