

**Shamanic Healing: A Qualitative Study Exploring  
the Effects of Soul Retrieval on Five Participants  
During One-to-Seven Years**

An Integration and Application Project  
submitted to the  
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by  
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## Chapter One

### Introduction to Shamanism

#### Shamanism Defined

The focus of this paper is to describe one of the common practices of shamanism, soul retrieval, and explore its effects on five participants during a one-to-seven year period.

Shamanism has existed for at least forty-thousand years. (Eliade, 1964; Harner, 1980).

The word shaman, saman, or hamman comes from the Tungus peoples, a central Siberian tribe, and functions as a noun and a verb. As a noun it means “one who is excited, moved or raised,” and as a verb it means “to know in an ecstatic manner.” (Grim, 1983, p. 15). It “generally expresses a revelatory experience of transcendent reality.” (Grim, 1983, p. 27).

Shamanism is a spiritual healing method that accesses immediate knowledge of the sacred. The shaman embarks on a “soul journey” or “magical flight” which entails a visionary experience in non-ordinary reality. (Eliade, 1964; Peters, 1989). Healing occurs while the shaman is in a trance state. The spirits work through the shaman to determine an illness, interpret dreams and visions, guide the souls of the dead, restore harmony and recover lost souls. (Grim, 1983; Ingerman, 1991).

#### The Shamanic State of Consciousness

Michael Harner (1987) defines shamanism as an ancient tradition that uses an altered state of consciousness to acquire knowledge and power to help others.

Shamans access an altered state through the repetitive sound of drumming or rattling, fasting, dancing, rituals or the ingestion of hallucinogenic plants. The shaman enters the shamanic state of consciousness, (SSC), to travel to other realms to interact with the spirits on behalf of the community.

L.G. Peters and Douglass Price-Williams (1992) identified three similarities among altered states: “the voluntary control of entrance and duration of the altered state; the ability to communicate with others during the altered state; the memory of the experience at the conclusion of the altered state.” (p. 36).

The shamanic healer is aware of her activities and movements when she alters her consciousness during a healing session. “Consciousness is defined as an organism’s total pattern of perceiving, thinking and feeling at any given time. The ordinary state of consciousness is day-to-day behavior and is a baseline by which altered states can be determined.” (Krippner and Welch, 1992, p. 35). The altered state of consciousness (ASC) involves a qualitative and quantitative shift in mental functioning. A person’s behavior is different and may be more or less alert, with more or less auditory imagery than during normal waking hours.

Exploring transpersonal dimensions of consciousness enables us to access other worlds and realities which provide unlimited sources of information about the universe. We transcend the ordinary limits of time and space. “There is evidence that suggests the universe and the human psyche have no limits and that each of us is connected with and is an expression of all existence.” (Grof, 1993, p. 84). Transpersonal experiences are not part of our imaginations but “an expansion or extension of our consciousness far beyond the usual boundaries of both our bodies and our egos, as beyond the physical limits of our everyday lives.” (p. 87).

The ability to alter the normal waking consciousness and enter into trance is a natural human condition. The function of shamanism and the ASC is to facilitate the healing process. "Shamanism and the ASC have formed a part of the basic adaptations of human beings to survive for tens of thousands to millions of years." (Dobkin De Rios and Winkleman, 1989, Introduction).

The shaman's normal state of consciousness becomes intensified or heightened as she experiences a soul flight or journey to an alternative reality. The SSC is where the shaman experiences her soul flying through space and visually travels to upper or lower worlds to gather knowledge or perform a healing for the benefit of others. (Eliade, 1964; Harner, 1987; Hultkrantz, 1979).

### **Shamanic Calling**

Shamans are called to their vocation in different ways. Some are initiated because of their ancestral lineage. These are considered lesser shamans among the Siberian and North American peoples. Among the Ammaselik Eskimo, only the gifted souls, dreamers and visionaries can be chosen. Greater shamans are called spontaneously through powerful initiatory dreams or mystical visions where a spirit or celestial being appears. In Siberian Yakut mythology, the shaman is carried in her initiatory dreams to the cosmic tree where the lord of the world sits at the top of the tree, represented by an Eagle. The souls of future shamans sit on the branches. (Eliade, 1964).

Other examples include psychotic episodes, revelations from vision quests and near death experiences. Often initiatory dreams and experiences are accompanied by a serious physical illness. The initiate opens to the world of the spirits to effect a cure and transcends a death/rebirth experience. The spirits

initiate the shaman into the mysteries of life and death. (Eliade, 1964; Drury, 1989).

The shaman realizes the universe is the real teacher and learns how to contact the wisdom of the spirits. The universe teaches according to our needs and our ability to understand. (Horwitz, 1995).

### **Shamanic Cosmology**

The shamanic cosmology consists of an upper world, a middle world and a lower world. The middle world corresponds to the earth while the upper and lower worlds exist outside of time and space. The shaman journeys to the upper and lower worlds to encounter spirit guides and power animals who assist the shaman in healing work. Power animals belong to the realm of archetypal reality. They have extraordinary characteristics which differ from animals in nature in that they are able to communicate and may have unusual characteristics. (Grof, 1993). The role of the power animal is to protect us in all worlds, to empower us, to provide guidance and support and to maintain health and well-being. (Harner, 1987; Ingerman, 1991).

The tree of life unites the upper, middle and lower worlds and symbolizes the flow of energy which maintains life on earth. With this in mind, the shaman transmits a healing and vitalizing energy. There is a need to connect life on earth with what is sacred to give meaning and direction. The shaman's journey demonstrates the relationship between the cosmic worlds and reminds us that all things are alive and connected. (Grim, 1983).

The shamans' journey begins in the middle world where she looks for an opening in the earth such as a cave or a hole at the bottom of a tree. She enters a tunnel which descends to the lower world and encounters a landscape in non-

ordinary reality which may be a forest or a seascape. This is where she meets her spirit helpers who give her the direction she needs to acquire knowledge and help others. The upper world journey begins in the same way. The shaman looks for a landmark such as a tree, ladder or mountain where she can ascend upward. There, she encounters gods, goddesses, teachers and ancestors who give her advice and direction. (Harner, 1980).

“From the shaman’s point of view, the non-ordinary reality of the spirit world exists parallel to the ordinary reality of our consciousness and is independent of our minds. The shaman, knowing that all things created have a soul, also knows that it is possible to communicate with these other spiritual essences by journeying to them, breaking through the boundaries of time and space... the power of the shamanic journey resides in the fact that it is a journey of the soul, and that the shaman’s soul returns with the power of the universe, which is the strongest medicine to be found.” (Horwitz, p. 2).

### **Animism**

An important purpose of shamanism is to connect the spirit world and ordinary reality. Shamanism is founded on the animistic belief that all things in the world and the universe have souls, are alive, possess consciousness and are interconnected. Animism is a belief in spiritual beings, the belief that souls may exist apart from bodies and that the soul is the principle of life and health. (Random House College Dictionary, 1980). According to animism, what appears to be inanimate is actually alive and has a soul. Because everything is alive and connected, the practice of shamanism enables us to interact with the spirit or life force of all things.

### The Shamanic View of Power

Jonathan Horwitz (1995), an anthropologist and shamanic practitioner living in Copenhagen, considers spirits to be forms of energy which identify themselves to us in ways we are familiar, such as animals or teachers. He believes that the universe hears our prayers and often teachers come to us in spirit form. The term “power” in shamanism is defined as a “basic life energy, similar to chi,” and the German word, “Kraft,” which is a “constructive, lifting and energizing power.”

The English use of power is associated with “Macht,” or “might,” which is a force or an authority that has control over something or someone. People use might to control others. Horwitz believes the spiritual root of might is fear. “When people are afraid, they need to control; the best way to control is to take away other people’s power, and the power that they often take away is people’s energy, be it their physical or their spiritual energy.” (p. 9).

In shamanism, the word “power” is used to mean “energy.” Michael Harner (1980) states that maintaining one’s personal power is essential for well-being. Carolyn Myss (1996), a medical intuitive, also equates energy with power and believes that power is essential for healing and maintaining health. “Our attitudes and belief patterns, whether positive or negative, are all extensions of how we define, use or do not use power...many people who lose something that represents power to them— money, or a job,....develop a disease. Our relationship to power is at the core of our health.” (p.45). It is necessary we become aware of what gives us power. If we are power filled, that is, filled with energy or a vital force that gives us the ability to live, then there is no place for

illness to come into our bodies.

### The Shamanic View of Soul

Power, soul and energy are defined as a vital life force. The Random House College Dictionary (1980) defines soul as “the principle of life, feeling, thought and action in man; regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body; the spiritual part as distinct from the physical part.” Sandra Ingerman (1991) refers to the soul as our “vital essence.” (p. 11). Carolyn Myss (1996) regards “our spirits, our energy and our personal power are all one and the same force.” (p. 64).

The Yupik Eskimo believe in the immortality of the soul and the soul is identified as the principle which sustains life. The soul remains near the body for a certain time after death before “going to an extraterrestrial realm to await rebirth.” (Fitzhugh and Crowell, 1988, p. 257).

Ake Hultkrantz (1979, 1981), an anthropologist who has written extensively on shamanic cultures, discusses the idea that every human being has two souls. One is the soul of the body which is the vital, life principle or breath that grants life and takes care of bodily functions to maintain life. The other is the “dream soul” or “free soul.” It is identical with the person, has feelings and is able to travel during sleep or shamanic trance to “various psychic twilight zones”. (p. 131). The “free soul” is the one the shaman sends to the upper and lower worlds to converse with the spirits or retrieve lost souls.

### The Shamanic View of Disease as Soul Loss

Shamanic cultures believe that “all disease has its origin in a disturbed relationship with the supernatural.” (Hultkrantz, 1992, p.1). Illness is the result of a loss of power, energy or soul. Something or someone takes away our energy. Soul loss occurs when a part of our vital life force, energy or power becomes separated from us due to an emotional or physical trauma. A disassociation occurs, that is, a part of the soul leaves and resides in the spirit world when a situation becomes too painful to bear. Disassociation is a survival mechanism which allows us to live through the trauma. There are many reasons for soul loss: accidents, violence in the home such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse, addiction, loss of faith or self-esteem, death of a loved one, divorce, depression, prolonged anxiety, combat, having to please others in order to fit in, natural disaster, illness or surgery. Other examples are when we give our souls away to others, as in codependence. Sometimes our souls may be stolen by those who are not in their power and take the life force of another to replace what they are lacking in themselves. The shaman journeys to the upper or lower worlds to find the piece of the soul which left and returns it to the individual by blowing it into the chest and the fontanel area of the head.

The symptoms of soul loss are disassociation, feeling separate from others or the environment, suicidal tendencies, profound loneliness, physical illness, depression, post traumatic stress disorder, addiction and coma. When we experience a loss of power or soul, an opening occurs that leaves us vulnerable for harmful energy to fill the void. This is called an intrusion. An extraction is needed to remove the energy which is causing discomfort. The symptoms for an



intrusion are localized pain or illness such as heart problems, cancer of the lungs, stomach ache, knee problems, fatigue, disease or chronic misfortune. (Ingerman; 1991). The shaman travels to non-ordinary reality to ask the spirits for a healing, and following their direction, will perform an extraction, give advice or retrieve the lost soul.

### **Healing the Soul**

A soul retrieval is not only important for vitality and health, but also to realize our purpose and meaning in life. In doing so, we free ourselves from the ordinary sorrows and confusions of life and achieve aliveness, joy and certainty.

When we recall the lost parts of ourselves, we are energized with a positive energy that makes us whole. When we are whole, the realization of being connected to the divine universe is made possible. When this occurs, we are able to transform ourselves in a spiritual light, and bring ourselves and our gifts to the world.

### **Description of Following Chapters**

Chapter Two, entitled Personal Encounters with Shamanism, describes a brief personal history, the incidences that set the stage for soul loss and my journey to wholeness. I include the basic precepts of astrology and psychology which contributed to my spiritual growth and describe the spirit dream and illness that changed the direction of my life to becoming a shamanic healer. Information from the basic workshop with Michael Harner is included along with the benefits I have received from soul retrieval.

Chapter Three, *Encounters With a Shamanic Practitioner*, includes an interview with Michelle Stringham, who has practiced shamanic healing for twenty years. Michelle discusses her background, her views on western medicine and the issues concerning the revival of shamanism in our culture. Her procedure for soul retrieval and the healing I experienced are described.

Chapters Four and Five, *Research Project on Soul Retrieval*, a study I carried out using qualitative methodology and case study interviews includes a brief literature review on other studies on soul retrieval and a pilot study to test the interview questions. I interviewed three individuals on their soul retrieval experience. The interviews, pilot study and my soul retrievals will be included in the analysis and described in the Results section.

Chapter Six presents the conclusion to the study.



## Chapter Two

### Personal Encounters with Shamanism

In this chapter I discuss a brief personal history and my affinity for nature and art. I include the basic precepts of astrology and psychology that contributed to my spiritual perspectives and describe the spirit dream and subsequent illness that changed the direction of my life to practice shamanic healing.

#### Personal History

I was brought up in a middle class family in the midwest. My parents were not spiritually inclined nor did they have a connection with nature. Life at home was troubled from the beginning. My father was full of rage and physically abused everyone at home on a regular basis. We were victimized and often feared for our lives. I was frightened most of the time and did not have a clue as to who I was or if life had meaning. I left home at the age of 18 in the early 1970's because I was determined to live on my own.

I was drawn to the mountains of Colorado. I moved to a small town and when I had the time, took long hikes in the wilderness and climbed to the top of various mountain peaks in the area. Viewing the world from a 14,000-foot-summit triggered a transcendental feeling of ecstasy. I found a spiritual connection and appreciation for the virtues of all living things and developed a new attachment and respect for the grand, eternal beauty of the land. It was during these years that I regarded nature as a valuable teacher and began to draw the rocks, rivers and trees. I wanted to perceive them. I felt the earth was alive and I believed in spirits. I became sensitive to the environment. I read the

adventures of Carlos Casteneda and his teacher, Don Juan, who opened the doors of perceiving reality in non-ordinary ways. This was my first introduction of a shamanic relationship to the world.

Time passed and this chapter of my life came to a close when I returned to the city to study art. My interests focused on the aesthetics of art, nature and symbolism. I made the transition from exploring the world in the wilderness to discovering myself through introspection. Over the next twenty years my interests in art and dreams led to the study of Jungian psychology, the tarot and astrology.

### **Spiritual Perspectives**

This section discusses the basic concepts of Jungian psychology, the tarot and astrology that influenced my direction twenty years ago. I compare the similarities of psychology and astrology with shamanism.

Jungian psychology brought me to the understanding that to become a complete human being is a life-long process that requires an awareness of our entire personality and psychological self. We begin by understanding that our conscious ego represents only a part of our total self and that it is through the unconscious making itself known to our conscious mind that we have a greater awareness of who we are.

Consciousness develops from the unconscious which gradually rises to seek expression. The unconscious contains information which is unique to an individual yet similar to all of us. As we become familiar with its contents, we develop a functioning, mature personality. The ego holds a limited awareness of who we are because it is incapable of knowing the entire contents of our highly

complex, collective psyche.

We are the containers for the evolution of consciousness. For this process to occur, we need to develop a working method where the conscious ego and the unconscious communicate and understand each other. The ego is limited in its perception and needs to become aware of the greater realities, potentials, forces and attitudes that exist within the unconscious. Access to inner worlds is gained through dreams, ceremonies, religious experiences, myths and meditation. If we ignore this information, we invite pathology into our lives through body symptoms, compulsions, depression and neurosis. Jung emphasized the need to synthesize unconscious contents with the conscious mind to actualize one's unique individuality. Dream analysis builds consciousness. Learning how to interpret the symbolism from our dreams or body symptoms, brings awareness to what is meaningful. We gain insight into the conflicts and challenges we face and discover new strengths in our character. We contact our spiritual selves. Dreams represent the varied parts of ourselves and dialoguing with dream characters gives us a broader understanding of who we are. (Johnson, 1986).

Shamanism relates in many ways to Jungian concepts. Knowledge is accessed through journeying to the lower and upper worlds where we dialogue with archetypes or power animals and spirit guides. If we ignore information from our psyche or become disassociated from ourselves, we are susceptible to body symptoms, depression and soul loss. When we give life expression through ritual and ceremony, we honor the spiritual and have a greater understanding of who we are.

The tarot is considered an ancient book of wisdom, a collection of symbolic, archetypal images that represent mythological and psychological experiences in life. When we select tarot cards for a reading, the inner worlds of the deep self communicate with the conscious mind through symbolism and imagery to bring clarity, insight and guidance. I consider the characters portrayed in the Albano-Waite tarot deck as aides who guide through dialogue and imagination. I have used the tarot as a tool for understanding and knowledge for eighteen years.

Astrology introduced me to an ancient, dynamic system where observation and correlation of external and internal events could describe various characteristics of human nature. When I discovered that the axiom “as above, so below” describes a universal system where all things are connected, I came to view the universe as an ocean of energies. It was through the ancient observations of the planets that we began to create order from chaos and understand who and where we were on planet earth. We aspired to understand ourselves. The sky provided a regularity of events, such as night and day and the cycles of the moon. These events were predictable and seasonal. The rhythmic appearance of the planets in the night sky brought the expectations and dependability of time and order. What appeared chaotic could be seen as various events and images in relationship to a universal background. Nature was seen as the cyclic interplay of energies in a common ground which gave meaning to life through integrating a variety of internal and external events. Astrology connected me to a greater universe of living energies and taught me to view others in an objective and spiritual light.

Astrology and shamanism are connected through similar cosmological structures. All things in the universe are seen as alive and interconnected. The shamanic world tree connects the lower, middle and upper worlds of power animals, life on earth and spirit guides. This corresponds with the astrological view that planetary forces above correlate to the internal psychological processes and external events on earth.

Over the years, psychology, astrology and the tarot directed my attention to a spiritual understanding of myself and my relationship to the world. I worked with a Jungian analyst to overcome recurrent anxiety attacks as a result of the physical abuse I had suffered. These tools contributed to acquiring a greater awareness for making changes, solving problems and self-knowledge.

### **Initiation to Shamanism**

In 1994, a few months before my 40th birthday, a power animal appeared in my dream. This was not an ordinary dream where vague imagery makes subtle appearances while sleeping. It wasn't a nightmare or the kind of dream where the psyche compels a sense of urgency that grabs your attention. This was something I had never felt before. It was extremely powerful and otherworldly. When I awakened, I was overwhelmed.

### **Dream**

In my dream it is late at night and darkness surrounds me. I walk into a room and stare in utter amazement of what is before me. I am overwhelmed by the sheer size and power of this creature. I step a little closer and notice I am barely reaching his enormous shoulders. I gaze up into his face. I have seen him before; he is a huge Alaskan grizzly



bear. His eyes are both gentle and intense, painful and all-knowing. His mouth is open, exposing his incisors. He sits on the floor, resting his back against the wall. Tufts of his thick, coarse fur and hide have been pulled up and away, exposing his raw muscle underneath. The wounds are patterned around his mid-section. On the top of each wound and tuft of fur rests white, burning candles. I pull back to take in the whole picture and behold his astounding entirety. He looks like an old-fashioned christmas tree decorated with candles. It is beautiful and a little eerie. I zoom in for a closer look. The exposed muscle is pink and healthy. The fur is layered with several shades of warm brown and the candles are white, topped with an orange flame.

The power of the dream persisted for several weeks. At the time I was under a great deal of stress. I worked as a high school librarian and due to governmental budget cuts, I suspected my position would be terminated. On my 40th birthday, I lost my job and fell ill with a serious case of hives. The hives covered my body and disfigured my face. My illness lasted a year. Medical doctors and naturopaths could not provide any relief from this ordeal. Hives was a “mysterious disease” and I would have to “wait it out.” I would awaken in the morning, go to the mirror and be confronted by an image that barely resembled my former self. The transformation was unnerving. The continuous discomfort of this disease pressured me to inwardly search for the reason that I became ill. One afternoon, I was contemplating the relationship between my illness and the recurring images of bees, bears, beehives and trees. Bees work together to protect the queen as she procreates and sustains the life of the hive. The bear is protected with great strength and a thick hide that enables him to foray into the beehive for honey and withstand the stings of many bees. The tree provides a

home for the hive. The bees, bears and trees are linked together. The tree is an axis which conjoins the lower, middle and upper worlds. It is a spiritual symbol that represents the connection of all things. I realized there was an unconscious part of myself that did not feel spiritually connected and therefore was unprotected. I needed to strengthen my spiritual foundation and fully embrace the notion that “all things are connected.” Becoming complete would require aligning my faith with spirit. The connection of these ideas to my illness congealed and I felt a deep sense of relief. Miraculously, my hives disappeared within the week.

Instinctively, I was on the right track because I had previously enrolled in the Global program at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology a few months before. I felt ITP provided a rich environment for spiritual growth and learning. Transpersonal psychology is “concerned with the study of humanity’s highest potential and with the recognition, understanding and realization of unitive, spiritual and transcendent states of consciousness.” (LaJoie and Shapire, 1992, p.91).

The courses provided a framework where I could review my personal history and place the positive and negative experiences of my past in a spiritual context. Self-reflection exercises demanded a thorough examination of the attitudes, beliefs and thought processes that contributed to the reality I was creating. I explored my relationship to faith and realized that the power of our beliefs generate our potential to manifest reality. Thoughts are vibrations that can change the physical universe. It is important to focus on a believable idea which has a positive intention and to emphasize where the attention is being directed.

Interacting with symbols from the inner world or non-ordinary reality, and believing that something substantial has happened there, creates a belief about what is real, which influences the outer world. Our thoughts are energy and we have the ability to co-create with spirit and manifest reality. What a person believes, becomes a reality. (King, 1985).

Through meditation, developing inner awareness and writing, I could watch my thoughts from a more objective viewpoint. I could feel myself integrating and becoming more whole. I worked to understand the meaning of my dreams, followed my intuition, experienced synchronicities in nature, returned to expressing myself through art and began to trust my own sources of wisdom.

A few months into the program I studied the psychology of shamanism, written by Angeles Arrien (1992). After reading many books and articles on shamanism, everything fell into place. Finally, I was able to comprehend the bear dream and my illness from a shamanic perspective.

Shamans are sometimes called through a spontaneous dream or mystical vision. The initiatory dream often contains a spirit animal or bird such as a bear or an owl. The dream is often followed by an illness which may be serious or prolonged and compels the person to seek help from the spirits. The dreamer must accept the calling and begin training with shamanic teachers and spirit guides or face the consequences which could result in sickness. (Krippner, 1987; Drury, 1989). At first, it was difficult to believe, but I ultimately accepted that the bear dream and hives were a call to shamanism.

It was imperative that I learn as much as my finances would allow. I attended the 1996 basic workshop with Michael Harner in Seattle, Washington.

Harner originated the Foundation for Shamanic Studies and is one of the foremost experts on shamanic practices today. He briefly discussed the history of shamanism.

Shamanism was outlawed in Russia during the Russian revolution. Shamans were either incarcerated or murdered for their practice and it was against the law to own a drum. The drum is a tool that evokes the shamanic state of consciousness. The rhythmic beating of the drum induces the trance-like state for the shamanic journey to non-ordinary reality. Shamanism was once the common heritage for all people and the drum was not invented by any one culture.

Shamanism has always been accessible to all of us. The entire hidden universe is available to us and no one has ever proven that spirits don't exist. They are here to teach and protect us. The role of the shaman is to heal others. Spirits and shamans are compassionate and the purpose of shamanism is to bring back the spiritual connection of all things. The symbols of the drum, the circle, the sun, the moon and the horizon, signify the connectedness and unity of all things. Harner believes we are returning to shamanism. (Harner, my notes, 1996).

### **The Power of Shamanic Divination**

At the workshop we drummed and rattled to let the songs from our souls emerge. Harner taught us to journey to the lower world. We were to find a familiar place in ordinary reality such as a tunnel, cave, hole in the ground made by a snake or a rodent, whirlpool or waterfall, crack in a rock, well, mineshaft, or a hollow tree or stump. The assignment was to journey with a partner who I didn't know, one who should only tell me her name and the question she had for

my power animal. Harner instructed us to trust and accept any information that comes because the spirits show us whatever we need. My partner wanted to know what her life purpose was.

We laid on the floor touching shoulder, hip and ankle:

### **Journey**

I journeyed to the lower world and asked the question to my power animal. The image of horses in a corral appeared. One of the horses had scraped his leg on a nail that was protruding from the fence. I asked where I was and the answer was "Montana." I saw my partner tending to one of the horses and writing a book on how to care for them.

The journey ended and I conveyed the vision to her. To her surprise she expressed that her sister had a horse ranch in Montana and wanted her to move there to help take care of the horses! This was the first shamanic divination journey I participated in for another person. Because of the astounding accuracy of the vision, I have never doubted the information that I receive from the spirits. This particular journey taught me to trust in the spirit world. The connection restored my faith in the universe. My illness had demanded that I renew my faith without question and reconnect with the spiritual world. The communication with the spirits confirmed my beliefs.

### **Restoring the Soul**

The first soul retrieval I had was in 1996. I was immersed in the study of shamanism and was curious to see what would happen during a soul retrieval. I wasn't experiencing any particular symptoms that were associated with soul loss. However, in regarding the soul as a vital essence, I wanted to meet with the parts

of myself that had departed.

### Journey

The shamanic practitioner found one of my soul parts in the bottom of a lake. She was a five-year-old girl and quite angry from being scared and abused. An angel came in non-ordinary reality and performed a healing. The next soul part was around the age of 11. She was surrounded by an energy that paralyzed her and she appeared to be in a trance. The power animals called in the wind to move the force out. The angel restored her once again. The healing spirits balanced her chakras and brought them into full color. They revealed her purpose in life was to be a healer. The practitioner brought their essence back and blew them into my chest and the back of my head.

I noticed a difference in my energy right away. I felt a strong sense of inner peace and well-being. It was as if the old energy from the past had been released and now, everything was right with the world. I was calm, confident and happy. I felt a surge of energy for a couple of months and then it lessened as the healing became integrated with my whole self.

I journeyed to meet with the returned souls, welcome them home and learn more about them. The five year old was creative, adventurous and loved to be in nature. The eleven year old was intuitive, needed inner peace and enjoyed interpreting symbols. I was moved to spend more time outdoors to connect with nature. To honor the eleven year old, I decided to read the tarot as a profession. I continued to practice shamanism.

The second soul retrieval occurred at a 1997 soul retrieval workshop with Sandra Ingerman. We were practicing the procedure with partners. The

assignment was to find the souls who were willing to come back and help our partner at that time and return their gifts and strengths.

My partner discovered a part of my soul had departed while I was in my mother's womb. I left because I did not want to "deal with the confines of the physical body." This part of myself was bringing back the essence of pure life and freed me of the guilt for not wanting to "participate in three-dimensional reality."

The next image showed my soul at the age of five. Either someone had died or something had scared me. I became afraid of death and worried about what happened to people when they die. I was concerned about being lost in the underworld. The gift from this soul was to remember that souls never die; they transform and there is no need to fear death. It was important to remember to have "faith in the existence of other worlds."

The last soul part belonged to a young woman around the age of 18. I appeared to have injured my leg and couldn't walk. This was a metaphor for a fear of moving forward. This soul returned with the courage to bring my gifts and abilities into the world.

### **Summary**

As I mentioned earlier, life at home was troubled from the beginning. I was born into an abusive environment. It wasn't a surprise to learn that I had soul loss while in my mother's womb. I must have known that life at home was going to be an extreme situation and my soul wanted to back out. I remember my mother discussing the difficulty she had in giving me birth.

By the time I was five years old, I had been severely whipped, hit on the head and thrown on the ground many times. I witnessed my father push my mother down the stairs during a fight when she was pregnant with my sister. It was a frightening situation and my mother was afraid for the life of her unborn child. This was when I learned to fear death and worry about what happened to people when they die. When I was 10 or 11, I had become withdrawn to avoid the threat of punishment. I had been deprived of a natural childhood. When I was 18, my father had literally threatened to kill me. This was the last time I would let him abuse me and I left home to save my life. Although I had the courage and determination to be on my own, there were times I experienced loneliness, post-traumatic stress and existential angst.

Although the years with my father were difficult, I was fortunate that my mother and grandmother gave me love and support. I was well educated and they inspired me to have an appreciation for art and music. They contributed to my development and helped me along the way. When I moved to Colorado, it was the beauty of mother nature which kindled the healing of my wounds.

The self-reflection work at ITP and the soul retrievals have contributed to my wholeness and sense of well-being. I have been able to heal and release the past. I have connected to a universe where the spirits guide with knowledge and compassion. Soul retrieval brought conscious awareness and healing to the events that inhibited my growth. It also returned positive gifts and strengths that inspired me. After the second soul retrieval I started a spiritual counseling and shamanic healing practice in my community.



The symbol which best describes my experience with shamanism and soul retrieval is the image of the bear from my dream. The vision was profound and changed my life. The dream was a doorway to the power of the spirit world which enabled me to understand the greater scope of our existence. This amazing power taught me that all things are spiritually connected.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Encounters with a Shamanic Practitioner**

When I decided to write a research paper to study the effects of soul retrieval, I learned of Michelle Stringham, who had been practicing shamanism in my area for more than twenty years. I called her to describe my project and to see if it would be possible to interview three of her clients to determine what they found to be meaningful from their soul retrieval experiences. I also wanted to interview Michelle about her interests in this work and to get some feedback on the questions that I had prepared for the interviews. We decided to meet in her home to get acquainted and discuss the project.

Michelle is a mother of seven children. She is the co-owner of a health care clinic with her husband who is a medical doctor. I found her to be articulate, knowledgeable and willing to help with my project. The criteria for choosing the participants was to select individuals who were articulate and self-reflective, who took an active role in their healing, who were familiar with shamanism and who would be honest in sharing their experiences.

I wanted to interview Michelle on her background and how she became involved in shamanism. I was also interested in her procedure for soul retrieval. We set a time for the interview to be held in her home in March, 1998. I mailed a research participation agreement to her the following day.

#### **Interview with Michelle Stringham**

Michelle lived in Northern Africa when she was a young girl and came to the United States when she was 19. She has had an interest in healing and

mysticism from her earliest memories. Her environment was surrounded by magic and mysticism which provided a “rich experience.” She has always been interested in healing and has travelled extensively to study traditional healing practices. She learned shamanic healing from the Navaho, Kwakiutle and South East Asian shamans. One of her most important teachers in shamanic healing practices was Dr. Michael Harner, whom she met in the late 1970’s, when he was a professor for the New School for Social Research. She has been involved with the Foundation for Shamanic Studies from its inception. Having grown up in a third world country, she was not exposed to western medicine except when “they came at me with a needle for cholera, hepatitis and yellow fever.” She developed a negative response to western medicine because she remembered and associated it with the pain. When she began to study medicine cross-culturally, she developed a “deep respect” for western methods and has been the co-owner of a western medical clinic for several years. Michelle commented on western medicine:

*Every system has to know its limitations. The limitation with western medicine is the use of drugs for relieving chronic problems. People should be able to use all kinds of therapies, including herbs and soul retrievals without having to feel they are weird for doing so. The answer to chronic conditions is not always a pill. There are also a lot of flakes out there who are using alternative healing methods and we are going to have to decide what the guidelines are for regulating this.*

Michelle is an anthropologist and considers the study of traditional healing practices one of the “ultimate highs for human evolution.” What follows are the

highlights of the October 1998 interview that I held with Michelle Stringham. I have included my questions in bold face and the answers in italics.

**What is important to you about shamanic healing?**

*Shamanic healing practices have existed for thousands of years and continue to exist today although they were almost lost in the last 80-100 years. There has been a renewed interest that has been astounding. I first moved to the United States in 1970, when I was 19 years old. At the time there was no interest in shamanic healing and there were few people who understood it. In shamanic cultures the young people weren't interested in learning from the elders, there wasn't a new generation to continue the tradition and maintain the art form. When Michael Harner's book came out, many people became interested and are showing up now. The good side of this is the interest and keeping the practice alive cross-culturally. There are good healers who are springing up as a result of the work at the Foundation. The bad side is the trivialization. Some think if they learn a few techniques they are a shaman. It takes 10, 15, 20 years, your whole life, to become a shaman. I see people coming and going and it has become a fad, which is typical in this country. Many traditional healers around the world have backed off and have lost interest in working with Americans or western people. They feel their practice of shamanism has been butchered. Many tribes have said they will not teach their medicine to outsiders which is okay. because I believe this will all even itself out in 20-30 years. There are still a few people who are willing to teach, who don't have biases, who have been the elders, the old people. They come from a greater place of*

*compassion and wisdom.*

*Many great shamans and teachers have been passing over. Not many have left their legacy to someone who will take up the spirit of their teaching. However, all people of the world have practiced shamanism; it doesn't belong to any one people; it belongs to all human beings. The northern European tradition was wiped out during the Inquisition. Many of us are trying to revive this teaching in the world and that is most important to me. How we are going to revive it and in what spirit we are going to do it that does not trivialize it are important questions. Some people have learned to use the drum as a tool and a method to access shamanic states but what is missing is the hard work and the sacrifice of what it takes to become a healer. In most traditions a person wanting to become a shamanic healer would go through a process of being identified as a potential healer either through his or her own dreams or being identified by his or her people. It is a life-long process to develop this gift. Often times it includes vision questing which requires great self discipline and self sacrifice. It is difficult for people to get an idea of this. They should go to the wilderness sometime and try it. To go without food and water, take only a blanket, and spend four days and nights or whatever is required to have a vision, wilderness wandering, and being out in nature with the animals and the plants; it's not like lying down on your comfortable rug, putting on the headphones and listening to the drumbeat and having powerful, sacred journeys, and you don't have to do anything more than that. You don't take it to another level. I think this is a piece that is missing.*

*Another problem is many people want to use shamanism to support themselves economically, so they have a secondary gain. They see it as a way of earning an income. In traditional cultures this was seen as a calling and not a career vocation, and their people would support them. There was a sense of reciprocity. That doesn't happen here and obviously some form of economic exchange needs to take place, however, I think there is too much of a focus on monetary gain.*

**Could we go back for a moment and discuss one of your vision quests?**

*What is most extraordinary in my vision quests is in the planning. Everyone is different in how they plan for one. I know that the Lakota Sioux have special places they go to, to sacred grounds, and they have help and support from their medicine people. In other cultures what is required is the time alone in the wilderness. So one must choose a place and a time to do this. It's an entire process that begins with a person having to decide where she is going to go. The searching process begins for a place of power. It's a big deal, it's no easy thing. Some people are lucky and know where to go. There are special places set aside for the purposes of vision questing by the people. The other issue in today's world is where do you find a wilderness area? Where can you go to truly be alone? You have to bring in the possibility of interruption and, if so, how are you going to handle that? The other part is learning how to make that spot sacred. You have to learn how to put a circle of protection around you and ask for help from God and from the helping spirits. You then have to be willing to accept and receive whatever the teachings are in that space, in that time. So, if it is painful,*

*then you have to be willing to accept that. If it brings about great change in your life, you have to receive that. You have to be willing to accept whatever happens to you in the circle you have created and take personal responsibility. Everyone will have a completely different experience. It is hard to do a vision quest in this culture. Often, if people's experiences are uncomfortable, they want to look for someone to blame. There are a lot of legal liabilities that occur so people have to decide to do a vision quest on their own, without any help from other people because of the litigious environment we live in.*

### **What was your experience?**

*I was fortunate to have dear friends who supported me. Some are Native Americans, some are not. When this experience occurs, your reality changes. It is a journey you walk into and there are times when it is very scary.*

*I tend to be withdrawn from the human population. I've travelled so much and have been in so many cultures, I have a tendency to withdraw and feel lonely and misunderstood. What comes up for me during a vision quest is that I begin to long for human contact. I feel a huge love in my heart for all people. The sense of love and acknowledgement wells up and I feel a huge compassion for human beings and every aspect of life. I also feel a sense of duty in a way that I want to help others. I also become aware of how precious food is and sometimes I swear I can almost smell someone baking bread!*



*So, vision quests are important for self discipline. We have to be willing to work in the world and to do so unselfishly. Often our work doesn't always have financial gain. One of my teachers taught me to never sell my medicine. This has been told to me from my travels all over the world, to never sell your medicine. You can receive from it but you have to disconnect your ego from any secondary gain. If your ego is tied to what you're going to make out of this, you can't do your job right and you are doing your client a disservice. On the other hand, selling your medicine is selling something that you don't own. Your time may be valuable...these issues need to be worked out. Whenever I have encountered elder shamans, they have never charged me, and they all have told me to never sell your medicine.*

**What is your healing practice?**

*I mostly do shamanic work, and I have practiced soul retrieval for many years. I first became familiar with the concepts of soul loss and soul retrieval when I worked with Hmong refugees from South East Asia as a cultural adjustment skills counselor. My understanding of what this meant broadened with my education as well as the generous teachings of a wise Navaho elder and his wife and various other people from different parts of the world, particularly Africa. Sandra Ingerman, a staff person with the Foundation for Shamanic Studies wrote an excellent and insightful book, "Soul Retrieval", which opened up westerners' eyes and minds to this ancient concept.*

*I diagnose my client shamanically and I try to include a total healing experience. I receive instructions from the healing spirits when I journey*

*and I do what I am advised to do. I may be told to give a power animal retrieval, an extraction or a soul retrieval. I often perform an extraction before I can bring the soul back in. I don't fragment anything. It seems that most of us have some form of soul loss.*

**Is any illness, such as the flu, a loss of power or a loss of soul?**

*I think the more powerful people are the less likely they are to get sick. People, even if they have a lot of power, are going to be vulnerable at times. Sometimes we need to learn lessons and we get sick. Also, illness is caused by negative and malevolent thoughts projected onto others. Some cultures call this the 'evil eye'. The more focused that is, the more damaging it is. Our thoughts create our realities. The saying 'whatever you put out will come back to you threefold' means if you put out negative energy it will come back and harm you.*

**How can we deal with negative energy without denying its existence?**

*Negativity exists and it's out there and people don't have good coping skills so it brings up anger and fear. We are all looking at what to do with negative energy. The Tibetan system seems to be the most complex for dealing with negativity in productive ways. The Tibetan way of handling negativity is powerful, beautiful, compassionate and transformative. The shamans take the negativity and bring it into their bodies and allow the spirits that haunt the earth, the ones that live in the graveyards, haunted houses, the hungry ghosts, to feed upon the body of the shaman and eat the negativity that the shaman just brought into his body in a ritual fashion.*

*They go to the graveyard, to a place where there are a lot of hungry ghosts and they are eaten and dismembered by the hungry ghosts. The ghosts are doing what they like to do which is to consume, they can never get enough to eat. They take the negative energy from the shaman's body, eat it, and this is considered a good act because they are benefitting humanity. The ghosts then earn merits on a spiritual level. This is a beautiful, ecological model for transformation.*

**What is your procedure for soul retrieval?**

*I usually follow the procedure defined by the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, although not always. Over the years I have learned many different procedures and techniques, all of which I use depending on each situation. The longer one works with the foundation the more one is encouraged to be spontaneous in healing methods. I don't advertise, I only work from referrals. I require my clients to read Sandra Ingerman's book, Soul Retrieval, and Michael Harner's book, The Way of the Shaman, before they see me.*

*The concept of soul loss around the world, cross-culturally, is the same. Trauma, black magic, unhealthy lifestyles, addiction and not living in harmony can contribute to different degrees of soul loss. The day before I see a client, I make an offering of tobacco to the spirits in nature. When I see my client, I smudge with cedar or sage, I use a rattle to call in the spirits and sing or chant to transcend to the next step. I turn on the drumming tape, and sometimes I put my finger on my client's wrist to listen to their pulse. This connects me to their lifeline. I journey to the spirits and*

*tell them I am here for a healing. The spirits instruct me on what to do. The rest of the healing is up to them. I bring back the empowered, healed soul or soul parts and blow it into the chest and back of the head. Then I rattle to shake the energy into them so the energy won't go out and other energies don't come in. Sometimes I tell the clients what I saw and other times I don't because I don't want to re-traumatize them. I discuss the symbolism and ask the client to consider what it means to them. I then require a written letter describing what is going on with them in six weeks to two months. We have closure after all the questions have been answered.*

### **Summary of the Interview**

At this point I concluded our interview. Michelle discussed her background, her thoughts on western medicine and the issues concerning the revival of shamanism in our culture. She described the importance of being committed to shamanic work and discussed the discipline it takes to plan a vision quest. Medicine is not owned by anyone and she cautions people who practice for monetary gain.

I wanted to further my understanding of Michelle as a healer, to learn more about her procedure for soul retrieval and to experience a healing from her. I asked her for a soul retrieval and we made an appointment to meet in her home the following week.

### **The Researcher as a Participant in Soul Retrieval**

I believe the shamanic healing art of soul retrieval is a sacred experience. It is mysterious, in that the information and healing come from non-ordinary reality

which is outside of time and space. It is sacred because there are spirit guides and ancestors who are kind and willing to have compassion for us while we struggle with our lives in the middle world. It is beautiful and positive because we are given a renewed gift of ourselves that brings us peace and a holistic sense of who we are. I prepared for my soul retrieval a few days before the appointment. I journeyed to my power animals and spirit guides to honor them and thank them. I spent time outside and left an offering of cedar to the earth. I called in the spirits and prayed for them to be with me.

Michelle and I chatted for a bit on her carpet while she gathered her tools. She lit a candle “to find the way home” and wrapped a red string around my wrist. This was to help her find my soul parts in non-ordinary reality. She brought out her cedar and sage smudge sticks to bless the room. She rubbed cedarwood oil on my hair and shoulders. She rattled a circle around us and silently prayed and rattled to the four directions. I chose a quartz crystal for the ceremony and then I laid on the floor. Michelle wore a Siberian eye curtain which was a beaded headband with 1/8 x 4 inch long strips of leather that were sewed to the band from ear to ear and partially covered her face. This enabled her to move in and out of non-ordinary reality. She sat beside me and lightly struck her drum for a few minutes. She began to rattle and sing her healing song. Then she touched my left shoulder and the pulse in my wrist and began speaking out loud. I knew she was in the shamanic state of consciousness. She began talking to someone, a helping spirit, who instructed her to extract the anxiety out of my body. She cupped her hand on my solar plexus and began to draw out the energy. I concentrated on visualizing this energy leaving my body. She made a

gesture with her hands and quickly blew a short, hard breath from her mouth. She then brought the energy of warm water into my body, to soothe and calm my nerves. From that point on I don't remember everything she said or the order of what happened. The drumming tape was on and occasionally Michelle would speak out loud. There were times I would journey to visit my helping spirits, otherwise I would be present in the room. We passed the crystal between us during the journey. When Michelle finished she blew the soul parts through the crystal into my heart and head, turned off the tape and rattled around me to complete the process. We discussed her journey:

**Journey:**

Michelle went into a cave and met an old woman, a sorceress, who looked to be Russian or Siberian. She was gentle, kind and good. She had been waiting for a long time to bring me an egg, a glowing egg full of light, that carried medicine, knowledge and wisdom. Michelle said it was a gift from my ancestors. The woman was happy the time was right for me to have it. She had the egg in her possession for a long time and after giving it to me was able to move on to the upper worlds. Michelle found a soul part from around six years ago which left when I had experienced anxiety. She was instructed to perform an extraction. She said a shark appeared from a colorful landscape to eat the anxiety. She replaced the anxiety with the element of water to soothe my nerves.

This was an important aspect of my healing because I suffered anxiety attacks for many years as a result of being physically abused by my father during my childhood. Several years ago I resolved the anxiety attacks after working with a Jungian analyst. It didn't surprise me that there was soul loss around those

dark and trying times.

Michelle found another piece of my soul in a dark place where it had been hiding as a result of a life threatening situation. There were many times I felt my life was in danger as a result of my father's rage and violence. I was also afraid for my mother and siblings, who suffered as well. When I was 17 years old, my father made it very clear that I understood that he could kill me if he wanted to, and that is when I ran away from home. Michelle found this part of my soul, performed a healing and returned the essence of a "youthful, beautiful, funloving, young woman."

We talked a while longer and then I went home. I have noticed feeling more calm as a direct result of the soul retrieval and extraction.

### **Reflections on the Soul Retrieval**

I journeyed to thank the healing spirits and to greet the parts of myself that had returned. It is important that I continue to practice shamanic healing and write about my experiences. I also need to allow time for drawing and painting. I love nature, and I feel blessed. I thanked my ancestor who gave me the egg and began to contemplate its meaning. I thought about the elaborately painted Russian eggs I have seen. I thought about the mystery of the cosmic egg that is formed from light and color and the elements that make up the various realms of being. The shape of the egg is round and represents the world or the universe. It was synchronistic that Easter was a few days away, the time for renewal and rebirth. I thought about little chicks that have magically transformed from a seed to become what they are designed to be, breaking free from the confines of the egg to burst into the world of nature. Soul retrieval images and healing need to

mature over time. The symbol of the egg and the return of a beautiful and fun-loving woman inspire me to delve more deeply into the healing arts.





### Review of the Literature

For the literature review, I looked at other studies on soul retrieval and theses written on shamanic healing from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. I completed a thorough search for other studies on soul retrieval. Aside from Sandra Ingerman's book, *Soul Retrieval. Mending the Fragmented Self* (1991), I found one dissertation on soul retrieval written by Elizabeth Glenn. (1995). The thesis written by Michelle Morris, *Cancer Patients and the Shamanic Journey: Power Animals and Healing* (1995), related more directly to this research than did the thesis by Sharon Van Raalte. (1994). I will describe the focus of each study and their results.

#### Glenn's Study on Shamanism and Healing

The purpose of Glenn's study, *Shamanism and Healing: A Phenomenological Study of Soul Retrieval* (1995), was to study participants who "described themselves as having a loss of psychic energy, power or vitality" to find if they experienced an increase in energy following a soul retrieval. (p. 1).

Glenn defines the soul as the essence or life force of every individual which leaves the body when a person dies. It is also connected with the events of life. Any kind of trauma can cause the soul to "split, fragment or vacate the body." (p.24). Soul loss, or a disassociated aspect of the self is caused by an illness or trauma that results in a loss of energy. Through the healing process of soul retrieval, a shaman journeys to non-ordinary reality to return the lost soul parts thus restoring energy and a previously unconscious aspect of the self to the individual.

Glenn chose six participants who “experienced symptoms including chronic fatigue, anxiety, emptiness, depression, grief, or sadness, and/or who felt as though they had left a part of themselves behind when they left a close relationship, who felt chronically “not all here, and/or had a gap in memory”... (p. 98). The participants had a loss of energy for at least three years and expressed a desire for “greater vitality.” The measures for the study included the Experiencing Scale, the Myers-Briggs Type indicator, the Vigor Scale and the Self-Esteem Scale of the Gordon Personal Profile-Inventory, and the C.G. Jung Word Association test. Her study was to find “whether soul retrieval enabled participants to experience increased energy during a process of change which was hypothesized to include increased differentiation of preference of personality type.” (p.240). The participants met for six sessions with a shamanistic practitioner during which they received a soul retrieval, a power animal retrieval and also learned to journey to the lower world. This was to empower the participants to engage in the integration process of their returned soul parts.

### **Results from Glenn’s study.**

Testing indicated that all participants increased development of their intuition, extroversion and feeling functions, among other findings which are beyond the scope of this research. (p. 283). The results showed that following a soul retrieval were positive, short term effects. All participants who previously stated having a loss of energy for several years experienced a measurable change, an increase in energy, self-esteem, wholeness and empowerment. Glenn concluded that “communication with the spirit world in non-ordinary reality can provide a valid methodology for healing certain individuals in the Western

world. The results of soul retrieval indicate measurable, healthy change through an increased sense of empowerment and self-esteem in the lives of individuals who have long experienced a sense of loss of self, which can translate as a loss of energy.” (p. 287). It was recommended that the individuals in her study participate in a one year follow-up report regarding their vitality and greater sense of wholeness.

### **Cancer Patients and the Shamanic Journey: Power Animals and Healing**

The focus of Morris’ (1995) study was to explore the shamanic concept of personal power and its relationship to disease and healing. “Fundamental to shamanism is the importance of personal power. The power animal retrieval is a shamanic practice to restore power to people who are sick or dispirited.” (p. 3). Morris worked with a group of people with cancer who were experiencing a crisis. Her focus was to study the results from having a power animal retrieval.

#### **The healing properties of power animals.**

In shamanic cultures, power animals are guardian spirits. Their purpose is to protect and empower the individual. “The person who possesses a guardian animal draws upon the spiritual power of its entire genus or species.” (Harner, 1980, p. 74). Power animals are consulted on problems to give advice or guidance during the shamanic journey to the lower world.

#### **Illness from a shamanic perspective.**

Shamanic cultures believe disease results from disharmony, fear and soul loss. Disharmony results from feeling disconnected in some way, such as losing a connection to what has purpose and meaning in life. “ Fear results in a loss of

love, joy and trust which are the basic foundations of health.” (p.13). Soul loss occurs when there is “injury to the inviolate core which is the essence of a person’s being,” resulting in a variety of disorders. (Achterberg, 1988, p.121).

“In shamanism, we see that all illness, emotional, mental, physical and spiritual are treated the same. Whatever form it takes, illness is illness and shows disharmony in a person’s life.” (Ingerman, 1991, p.99). Shamanism is wholistic in its approach to healing.

### **Power animal retrieval with cancer patients.**

Fundamental to shamanic healing is the restoring of personal power through a power animal retrieval. Power animals are essential for health and well-being. It is a core shamanic practice to restore health or power to an individual who has become dispirited or ill.

Morris selected three participants with cancer and two who had recently recovered. She taught them how to journey to the lower world to connect with their power animals. They asked the power animals questions and were directed to trust their own experiences. The participants were to keep a journal and were interviewed regarding their experiences.

### **Results from Morris’ study.**

All participants found the power animal retrieval to facilitate transformative insights. The results showed an increased sense of empowerment, reconnection to spirituality and feelings of unity, positive impact on relationships and a greater ability to express emotions. Most of the participants reported greater appreciation of nature, feelings of peace and increased self-worth/self-love.

All participants received messages from their power animal that were meaningful to them.

The participants found an increased ability to set limits and boundaries. They were more able to face their fears and challenges. They experienced an increase in the power of choice-making and became more authentic. They were able to express their feelings more honestly. “The increase of empowerment was a major effect of this work.” (p.102).

### **Shamanism and Psychiatry**

The purpose of Van Raalte’s (1994) thesis was to bridge the ancient healing art of shamanism with contemporary psychotherapy and demonstrate the value of using alternative healing techniques with a traditional psychiatric model. Behavioral psychotherapy has focused on the rational or mental areas of development and has neglected spiritual methods of healing. Van Raalte was interested in “finding a theoretical middle-ground of common understanding between the two methods of healing.” (p. 15). She wanted to determine if shamanic journeying at a distance on behalf of the clients of a behavioral psychiatrist could produce results that would be useful to both client and therapist. The study involved five participants. Van Raalte journeyed at a distance on questions devised by the therapist concerning his clients. The therapist discussed the journey reports with his clients who confirmed the accuracy of the material presented in the journey.

### **Results from Van Raalt's study.**

The study showed that shamanic journeying at a distance was effective for retrieving information relevant to persons in behavioral therapy who had no prior knowledge of shamanism. All participants agreed to the accuracy and relevance of the information obtained from the journeys. Useful insights were gained about the clients which were not previously known. Theoretical discussions between the therapist and researcher ensued to the effective use of shamanic divination techniques applied in therapy.

The research validated the successful use of alternative healing methods within a traditional psychiatric model for healing. It also demonstrated the need to be open to shamanism as an effective and accurate resource for accessing information from the spiritual realm.

### **Summary.**

After reading Glenn's dissertation on soul retrieval I decided to study the effects of soul retrieval during a one-year period which later changed to a one-to-seven year period. I was interested in exploring any changes that were made as a result of soul retrieval and it was important to determine if there were long-term benefits. I preferred a qualitative, case study methodology because I believe that getting to the heart or truth of a person's experience does not have to be measured to be valid. Exploring the effects of soul retrieval over time would contribute to Glenn's findings if soul retrieval was found to increase self-esteem, wholeness and empowerment.

## Methodology

### Introduction to Research Design

I interviewed three participants who received one or more soul retrievals from one-to-seven years ago and documented common themes that emerged from their experience. I asked the participants to describe what was happening in their lives and why they chose soul retrieval as a healing method. My intention was to look for any changes that occurred as a result of the soul retrieval, to find what was meaningful to the participants and determine if there were long term benefits. My hope is that the research will contribute to the benefits of soul retrieval as a valuable healing method.

### The Significance of Soul Retrieval

The soul is considered the vital essence or life force that sustains life. Soul loss occurs whenever we experience a trauma such as “incest, abuse, loss of a loved one, surgery, accident, illness, miscarriage, abortion, the stress of combat or addiction. The basic premise is that whenever we experience a trauma, a part of our vital essence separates from us in order to survive the experience by escaping the full impact of the pain. What constitutes trauma varies from one individual to another.” (Ingerman, 1991, p. 11).

After a trauma, a person often senses that something is missing because a part of the soul has detached from the body and resides in the spirit world. A shaman journeys to the spirit world to retrieve the lost soul. This procedure restores the original essence of the person and generates a cure. I chose case study interviews to further my understanding of the causes for soul loss and the healing effects of soul retrieval.



### Qualitative Methodology and Case Study Interviews

The purpose of this interview study is to gain knowledge on the effects of soul retrieval by listening to the stories of people who have received one. Qualitative methodology is an effective method for gathering “an authentic understanding of people’s experiences...” (Silverman, 1993, p.10). It offers a deeper picture of people’s lives through observation and interview. “The interview is used to provide data that gives authentic insight into people’s experiences. The main way to achieve this is through unstructured, open-ended interview based on prior, in depth participant observation.” (p.91). Case study research is also concerned with understanding the meaningful events of life. It allows the researcher to get to the heart of the individual’s story through observation and interview.

Silverman states that open-ended questions that are general and used as guidelines offer a deeper understanding of what the participant considers to be meaningful. Open-ended questions are designed to gather descriptions of what happened to the participants and how it effected their lives. It allows individuals to define the world in their own unique way and to get to the heart of their experience. (Silverman, 1993).

I was intrigued with the prospect of listening to people describe their soul retrieval experiences because I believe in the healing attributes of storytelling. I first experienced the power of storytelling at the 1996 Shamanism and Creativity workshop with Marilyn Youngbird and Hal Zina Bennett. A group of us sat in a circle and witnessed many voices express their concerns, sorrows and gratitude for what had happened in their lives. Marilyn and Hal offered their wisdom and

insight to each individual. All experiences were acknowledged by listening to one another. The circle connected us in spirit.

Angeles Arrien (1989) states that “storytelling can re-shape an individual’s experience or life story.” When we tell our stories, we describe what we were before, what happened and what we are now. We reconnect to our experiences for the purpose of learning or teaching others. Being truthful to our experience enables us to understand reality in different ways. When we tell our individual stories, we learn to own what belongs to us rather than listen to what other people think we should be. We find our home through the telling and listening of stories. (Kurtz and Ketcham, 1992).

Qualitative research and case study interviews aim to understand the core of human experience through gathering data that is rich in description and meaning. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The findings are not quantified or measured in a statistical or mathematical way. They provide an environment for the expression of subjective human experience rather than setting a measured experiment in a laboratory. Asking interviewees to describe in detail their experience and how their lives have been effected gives data that provides authentic insight into their experiences. “...the type of knowledge gained and the validity of the analysis are based on deep understanding.” (Silverman, 1993, p.95).

### **Responsibilities of the Researcher**

To gain a full understanding of the participants’ experience, the researcher attempts to record the story in the words of the teller to understand social phenomena and retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. It is important for the researcher to be a good listener, to be flexible and to have

a firm grasp on the issues being studied. (Yin, 1984).

Kvale (1996) says it is important to provide an atmosphere where the participants feel comfortable to discuss their feelings and experiences. Asking for clarification or to describe something in more detail are methods for collecting more information. It is necessary to follow a general plan or set of questions to be used as guidelines and to ask the participants for their opinions. The researcher needs to remain open, alert and non-judgmental. After reviewing the criteria for qualitative methodology and case study interview, I wrote a set of questions for the pilot study. I contacted Michelle to present the questions and corroborate on the research design.

### **Research Design**

I discussed my project with Michelle to see if I could interview a few of her clients who received a soul retrieval from more than one year ago. She agreed to this. Michelle wanted to take an active role in making the final decision for choosing the participants. She felt a responsibility to protect the privacy of her clients.

The criteria for choosing the participants were as follows:

- The individuals must be committed to their spiritual healing and development.
- They must be articulate and self-reflective.
- They must be familiar with shamanism and know how to journey in non-ordinary reality.
- They must be open and honest in sharing their experiences.

There were several people who were willing to participate in the research. Michelle telephoned her clients to propose the study and give them a background on me. The participants were two woman and a man who were forty-nine and fifty years of age. The age of the participants was incidental. I then asked Michelle to review the interview questions and she did not find any changes that needed to be made.

I mailed an introduction to the research project, a research participation agreement and a list of interview questions to the participants. The questions were to be used as guidelines to recall their soul retrievals. All participants telephoned Michelle to remember their experience and review the notes she had kept on file. One interview was conducted in the participant's home; one interview was conducted in my backyard, and one was taken over the telephone. Each interview was audio-taped and partially transcribed. I omitted sections when the conversation strayed too far from the soul retrieval experience, such as talking about the dog, etc. The transcriptions were sent to the participants for their verification and to be edited to the degree they thought was necessary to convey their story or to protect their privacy. From the direction of my mentor, the transcriptions were edited once again for grammar.

I decided to include the interview from the pilot study and my soul retrieval experiences in the results. The data collected from the pilot study and from my own soul retrieval experiences are included after the last interview with Susan.

### Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted to see if the questions enabled the participants to focus on what was meaningful to them from their soul retrieval experience and yet be general enough for them to be flexible and descriptive in their own words. I asked for a critique on any aspect of the interview that could be improved.

The criteria for selecting the pilot study participant was to interview a client of Michelle's who took an active role in her healing process, who was articulate and who would be discerning when evaluating the interview. To protect her privacy, I changed her name to Katherine.

Michelle telephoned Katherine to discuss my project, to see if she was interested in participating in the study and to let her know I would be respectful of her privacy and soul retrieval experiences. I felt this helped to build trust between Katherine and myself. We had an amicable conversation on the phone and made an appointment to meet in her home the following week. I mailed her the research participation and confidentiality agreement that described the study and insured her privacy. I interviewed Katherine in her home on February 13, 1998.

Katherine is a European American who works in the field of education and who is in her middle years. She began her shamanic work in 1988 as "a direct result of having breast cancer." She was referred to Michelle Stringham, a shamanic practitioner, who taught her guided imagery, visualization and shamanic journeying. This work taught Katherine how to "help herself through the modern medical treatments without suffering the side effects most people do"

and she attributes being alive today to Michelle. Later, Katherine participated in a women's study group led by Michelle where she practiced shamanic journeying and learned about soul retrieval, extractions, vision quests and other shamanic practices.

### **Katherine's soul retrieval experience.**

Katherine's first soul retrieval was in December, 1994. She was beginning to "feel the parts that were missing." She reflected in an essay she wrote after her soul retrieval experience with Michelle:

#### **Journey.**

In the lower world you encountered erected barricades behind which was a landscape of snow, ice and cold. You could barely see me there but when you called to me I told you not to enter this place. I was crying tears of blood and I was so cold I was almost dead. You came to me and took me back to a cave which was like a place protected from the weather. There, you warmed and revived me.

This was an important moment for Katherine as she remembered her past in the Canadian rockies at the end of a bad marriage. "Michelle didn't know of the night I lost my soul in the ice and cold and yet fifteen years later she returned it to me." It was during this time that Katherine decided to take back her maiden name which has had a long lasting effect. "What came out of this experience was a realization that other parts of me were lost" and this was "most important" because it was the journey to "reconnect everything."

In May 1996, Katherine had another soul retrieval. She was going through many transitions and was feeling depressed and somewhat anxious. During the

retrieval one of her ancestors appeared and helped her. Katherine felt this ancestor was from her father's lineage. She had not known her paternal grandmother who died when her father was 15 years old, and she had only seen her paternal grandfather once or twice when she was very small. Since her father rarely spoke of his parents and his history, this connection with the ancestor gave her an important link to her heritage. I asked if there were any obvious changes from this experience, and she affirmed that there was "an overall sense of improved well-being and more peacefulness. I suffered depression off and on throughout my life, and as I become more connected with myself, I suffer less depression." She noted this as a key point in soul retrieval.

Katherine described soul loss as energy loss. She can feel when energy is leaving her body. "We have lost a lot of energy to a lot of situations throughout our lives and we need a symbolic ritual such as soul retrieval to help us reconnect with the part that was lost." I asked her if she thought soul retrieval returned energy to her. She replied, "Oh definitely, it's like filling a space that has been empty."

Katherine believes shamanic work as a whole has given her a better perspective of herself and that it has helped her to be more accepting of her intuitive ways of knowing. The most important aspect has been the overall sense of well-being.

The symbol she used to describe her experience over the years was that of a live, beating heart. Her first soul retrieval reconnected her to her heart, which was a profound healing for her. At this point we concluded our interview. Katherine felt she had covered what was meaningful to her over the years from

her shamanic work.

### **Interview critique.**

The first suggestion Katherine made was to have the study cover more than one year. She felt the integration process for soul retrieval takes more than a year to process. She suggested that I explain in the letter of invitation that the questions are meant to be a guideline to recall the soul retrieval experience, but that the interview would be conducted as a dialogue. She felt more comfortable with a dialogue format rather than a question and answer format. She also felt I needed to mention that I honor the interview as a personal experience and that the participant was not obligated to share any aspect that was uncomfortable. She pointed to a couple of places during the interview where I needed to ask for more of an explanation describing what the participant meant rather than making an assumption of what was said. She felt the questions did not need any changes.

### **Summary.**

I was pleased with our interview and felt the critique was valuable. Katherine became interested in shamanic healing in 1988 “as a direct result of having breast cancer.” The guided imagery, visualization and shamanic journeying helped ease the suffering of side effects from chemotherapy. The soul retrieval enabled her to resolve past issues regarding her divorce and she took back her maiden name, which had a “long lasting effect.” She realized other parts of her were lost and she began a journey to “reconnect everything.” An ancestor from her father’s lineage appeared during her second soul retrieval in 1996 which gave her a link to her heritage and helped her feel more connected



and peaceful. As I listened to Katherine's experiences it was clear that shamanic healing had significantly contributed to her sense of well-being.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Briefly describe who you are as a person.
2. Describe what was happening in your life and why you decided to have a soul retrieval. What year was this?
3. Describe in detail what was meaningful for you from this experience.
4. Try to recall any feelings, sensations or other responses you had when your soul parts were returned to you. Did you notice a change in vitality?
5. How did soul retrieval contribute to your spiritual path? Did it lead you in a new or different direction? Did it resolve or bring closure to present issues or past experiences? Did your life change in any way over the year? If so, please explain.
6. Did this experience have a lasting effect on you over time? What happened?
7. Feel free to discuss any aspect of your soul retrieval experience that you find especially important.
8. Is there a symbol or image that would describe your experience?

### **Comments on the Interview Process**

The recommendation from the pilot study was to conduct the interview as a dialogue. I found the dialogue format detracted from the focus of the participants in recalling their stories. I limited my participation to:

- referring to the interview questions when needed
- asking for a clarification

- asking for a description

### Analysis of the Data

The thematic content analysis began by listening to the audio tapes of the interviews. I found it helpful to listen to the voices of the participants for emphasis on what was meaningful and for emotional content. I then read the edited transcripts without taking notes to become more familiar with the participant's experiences. The next step involved reading each interview to take notes on the individual themes that emerged. After this, I took notes on the individual themes from the pilot study and my soul retrieval experiences. I gathered the notes from all of the participants, the pilot study and my soul retrievals to review them as a single body of data. If four out of the five participants had themes in common, the themes became a category. The criteria produced five categories. After the five categories were determined, I reviewed all five soul retrieval experiences and placed the elements from each experience in the corresponding category. The five categories are listed below:

- Causes for seeking a shamanic healing
- Symptoms that were experienced
- Prescribed rituals and/or personal methods for self-healing
- Results from the soul retrieval
- Symbols that represent the participants' soul retrievals



## Chapter Five

### Research Project on Soul Retrieval: Results and Discussion of Study

#### Results from the Analysis

There are two parts to the results section of this chapter. The first part includes the interviews and the categories that emerged from the analysis procedure. The interviews are a synopsis of the participant's soul retrieval experiences and are written using their own words wherever possible. The data following each interview shows the individual elements presented in each category.

The second part of the results section presents a thematic analysis which includes the data from all participants in each category. This is to organize the data as a whole to further distill and compare what the participants experienced.

Table I, entitled Thematic Analysis, illustrates the themes that emerged from the data and the number of participants that contributed to each theme.

#### Interview with Robert

Robert is fifty years of age, caucasian and is an ecologist. He takes an active role in his healing and self-discovery and is currently participating as a member of a men's group. He agreed to interview with me in his home on April 20, 1998.

#### **Why did you decide to have a soul retrieval?**

*My first soul retrieval was in April, 1995. During the previous year, my brother had died and I had left a relationship. Since 1970, I had lost two brothers and my mother and father. I was in counseling at the time and I felt I literally had a large wound in my heart. During my childhood there had*

*been a shortage of love and nurturing in my family and I felt unresolved pain from their deaths. I had a broken heart from the loss of my relationship and I was feeling a lot of sadness. A friend of mine recommended that I see Michelle Stringham for a shamanic healing.*

**Journey:**

Michelle journeyed to the land of the dead and went to a cave and then across a river to the land of the dead where she found an infant. She negotiated with a crow to release my infant self. Then, she left a gift of Eucalyptus leaves and tobacco in exchange for the soul of the infant. Then she was at a place where the sea and the river meet and there were many dolphins.

*When she finished she explained that I have had soul loss since the time of my birth. I remembered that one side of my body was paralyzed a year after I was born. I was quite sick, hospitalized for a few weeks and nearly died.*

*I felt more complete as a result of the soul retrieval. In terms of physical sensations, I had a feeling in my eyes as if I had been swimming for days. My peripheral vision was limited after the soul retrieval and I could only focus on what was in front of me. I felt a heightened sensitivity in regard to my vision. This occurred for a few hours after the soul retrieval. The journey caused me to go back and review letters that I had from my parents and review my baby book to try and make a connection to the time of my soul loss. I had been viewing everything through the gauze of the death of my infant self and the death of those who were near me. The sensitivity in my eyes helped me to see my way through and not be effected*

*by what had gone on before. I felt I had been living without all of my pieces for many years and I had adapted as best I could to living in this impaired condition. Even though I had my soul parts back, they were unfamiliar, so I didn't feel like there was a permanent change in my vitality or direction in life. But I did feel that I was beginning to resolve my past. However, I felt I had to go through more experiences before I could say that I was healed at that time.*

**Did you learn how to journey?**

*I did. I went to the basic training seminar at the Foundation for Shamanic Studies and was successful in learning how to journey to the upper world. It was the direction I was automatically led to. I continued to practice on a regular basis for six to eight months after the workshop.*

**Was it helpful?**

*It was helpful. I was able to make contact with my family. The sudden death of my father, in particular, was a huge loss. He was killed by an unknown assailant. There were many things around his death that had remained unresolved. His death was shocking and violent and there was an unreality to it. It was difficult to accept the event and that he wasn't there anymore. That was 28 years ago. Fortunately, the intense memories fade in time. I was able to make contact with him and my younger brother through shamanic journeying.*

**How was the contact with them during your journey?**

*It was good. I also made contact with my other brother who had died. I used travelling to the upper world as a way to allow the relationships to continue. It was good to get away from the notion that there is a finality in death. I had thought that there wasn't any possibility of becoming current with family members who have died, or moving on together, or allowing more richness in the relationship that I had with my family. Journeying was an avenue that enabled me to move on. It didn't feel like there was a barrier between my family and myself. I was able to contact them, even though they had left this world.*

*After my soul retrieval I had dreams that contained similar imagery that Michelle had seen during her journey. There was a shift from the unconscious to the conscious. The intensity of the soul retrieval began to fade a few weeks afterward and then a few months later it faded even more. Yet, I felt very different from when I initially went to see Michelle. At first, I felt physically different and more alert to the world around me. Later I felt calmer and more self-assured. Michelle said that things would turn around for me and in fact I think they have.*

*An image that best describes my experience would be that of a threshold or a doorway. As time went on, even though the intensity of the soul retrieval had subsided, I could feel myself walking through an archway that is a threshold to another world and another way of being.*

*The next soul retrieval was performed on the anniversary of my father's death in November, 1997. I felt there was something missing and I*

*wanted to resolve the issues from my past. I went to see Michelle. She journeyed to the upper world where she met my father and two brothers. They wanted to give me a celtic sword that represented ancestral power. My brother said that we weren't given the right tools as children. The sword was a tool for dealing with life. It carried the knowledge to survive. My brother said it was the last time we would make contact because he was moving on. My father and other brother were at peace. Michelle continued to journey and saw a part of my soul that was caught in what looked like a carved crystal. It represented my angry self. She called to the wind and water to heal the pain in my heart. After the soul retrieval, Michelle suggested that I regularly let the wind and the river take my anger away. I was to listen to the wind or the river and compose my own songs that would allow my feelings to go with the song to the river or the wind. This way I could let my anger go and not hold on to it. She also gave me an assignment to go on walks and collect rocks that represented my anger.*

*On my walks I was to find a rock that represented an issue that I had been feeling angry about that day. For instance, one rock represented the feelings of loss and sadness that were brought up during last Thanksgiving. Another rock represented an argument I had with my partner where I had felt the sharp knife of sarcasm. I discussed these matters with Michelle who suggested that I find a way to establish new family traditions and learn how to be angry without fighting with sarcasm. Another rock represented my feeling vengeful, and the healing message was to learn how to receive with a pure heart.*



**Did the exercises help?**

*They did. Michelle and I took a walk in a park. We figured out how to give the rocks up and put them in appropriate places. I threw a couple of them into the river and I kept another one. It was really useful for me to be actively involved.*

**Do you think the anger you felt was associated to the loss of your family members?**

*I'm sure of it, but I could never put my finger on it in conventional therapy. I needed a more active intervention. The conventional therapy didn't work even though I talked about my father's death in therapy and had said goodbye to him, it didn't have the kick that the shamanic work did, so it made me a believer.*

**Have these issues been resolved?**

*The past issues have been resolved although I'm still working on behavior modifications regarding my anger. I was poorly trained on how to be constructive with anger and I've had to learn a new path.*

*The symbol or image that I have thought about to represent this whole time is passing through the threshold. I've had sensations of turning the knob, pushing the door open and walking through, and seeing and feeling that it was safe.*

**What does the image of the sword mean to you?**

*The image of the sword symbolizes the ability to be effective. The spirits want me to be effective in the world. It is a tool for survival and signifies the ability to be decisive and focused in my direction.*

At this point I asked Robert if there was anything else he would like to add from his experience. He felt he had covered everything that was important. I thanked him for his open and honest participation and concluded the interview.

## Data Collected from Robert's Interview

### Causes for Seeking a Soul Retrieval

- 1995 • Unresolved pain from the loss of his parents and two brothers
  - Dissolution of a significant relationship
- 1997 ◦ To resolve past issues

### Symptoms

- 1995 • Felt like he had a broken heart
  - Sadness
- 1997 ◦ Felt there was something missing

### Prescribed Rituals and/or Personal Methods for Self-Healing

- 1995 • Learned to journey to the upper worlds to contact family members for closure
  - Developed new perspectives regarding death
- 1997 ◦ Ritual to let the wind and river take his anger away
  - Ritual to go on walks and collect rocks that represent various issues and then release them

### Results from the Soul Retrieval

- 1995 • Felt more complete as a direct result of the soul retrieval
  - A shift occurred from the unconscious to the conscious
  - Began to resolve his past
  - Felt more alert to the world
  - Felt calmer and more self-assured
- 1997 • Resolved the past issues regarding the loss of his family
  - Developed new methods for dealing with anger

### Symbols that Represent the Participant's Soul Retrieval

- 1995 • Walking through a doorway or threshold that represents another world and feeling safe
- 1997 ◦ A celtic sword that represents ancestral power and the ability to be effective in the world

### Interview with Anne

Anne is a counselor in domestic violence. She is Caucasian and Native American, and is 50 years old. Fifteen years ago she left her husband who physically abused her and caused her permanent physical damage. After her divorce, she enrolled in school and was the first person in her family to graduate from college. She won the national achievement award. She was honored in Washington, D.C., and was interviewed on television. When she returned home, she was confident she would find work, yet several months went by without success. I interviewed Anne at my home on April 30, 1998.

#### **Why did you decide to have a soul retrieval?**

*In 1991, I was helping a friend move. I picked up a box and my back went out. Because of my physical injuries, my back would sometimes go out when I picked up one of the kids or a box or something, and I wouldn't be able to move my legs from the waist down. I went home and laid on the bed for ten days. The pain was terrible and I was unable to walk.*

*I went to see a doctor who put me under the cat scan and x-rayed me and couldn't find anything wrong with my back. I decided to see Michelle Stringham who offered to journey and see what was wrong. I was skeptical at first, but I wanted to try this. We laid on the floor and Michelle began to journey:*

#### Journey

She searched for a long time and couldn't find my soul part. She crossed some barren land and noticed an antelope in the distance, about ten yards away. He was standing

by a deep pit. She walked over to the pit and looked down. She saw a young woman who was unable to get out. She was trying to get out and each time she would get halfway up the wall she would fall down again. She was searching in the pit for a way to get to the surface. Michelle went down with her and noticed several signs on the wall. There was a half moon and a star, and a picture of a shaman healing woman with an antelope. She then noticed a big hole in her back. She wasn't sure where it came from or how it happened but it was the size of a saucer and it was infected. It was right where my back was hurt. She packed the wound with herbs and patched some holes in my aura. Then we made little steps in the dirt and brought her out.

*Michelle blew the soul and the antelope into my heart and head. We sat up and I started sobbing. I didn't know where it was coming from. Michelle described her vision and said she had also seen a wire barrier with three-inch spikes coming out that was blocking the way out of the hole. Then, she helped me out to my car and told me to go home and write about the soul retrieval.*

*Within three days the pain was totally gone and in seven years it has never returned. Within one month, I had a full time job. I felt stronger and more whole as a result of the healing. Somewhere inside myself I had been feeling I wasn't good enough to come in first place. I was in a hole. After the soul retrieval I wasn't afraid to be seen or to be known and I was able to work with people. There was an inner peace. I had been lost for so long, I didn't know there was a part of me that was lost. Years ago, I was an aggressive person. Now, I am laid back and it takes a lot to get me upset. I handle anger in a different way now. I began to read books on shamanism.*

*The change was slow in the beginning, but after the first soul retrieval my kids noticed I had changed. With each soul retrieval that I have had, I feel there is more inner peace. I'll go along and then I'll notice something is wrong and that is when I go back for a soul retrieval, so I can get in touch.*

*The second soul retrieval was in 1992, about a year or so later. I felt something was wrong. This time, Michelle found a child in a valley. Along with the child was a tall black woman who had been walking with her. Her aura looked as if it had been torn apart. She was walking around in a state of amnesia. She didn't know where she was or what she was doing. This was from the time when I was sexually assaulted by my father when I was a little girl. My soul was torn to pieces. The tall black woman was my protector.*

*After this soul retrieval I joined a drumming group and I have learned how to journey. I have become very spiritual. I have practiced shamanic work with animals and people who have had cancer. The horse I worked with had cancer and was only to live a few weeks. I journeyed for the horse and the spirits gave me instructions on how to help him. The horse lived for fourteen months after I started working with him! I use my hands as a healing mechanism, they become like hot coals. I ask the spirits to come through my hands and relieve the pain.*

*My spiritual path did not develop until after my first soul retrieval. I felt there was a calling. I have become more and more at peace with myself. I now know when another piece of me is ready to come back and I can feel it weeks beforehand. I know that my soul is calling and it is going to make*

*me a stronger person.*

**Have you noticed a difference over time?**

*Yes, my dreams are not as frightening as they once were and my back has never bothered me in seven years. The learning experiences have never stopped and the healing has never stopped. I practice shamanism and I learn different healing methods from Michelle. I feel inner peace. I am more whole and stronger. I have been on a vision quest and I also stopped hunting animals after my first soul retrieval.*

*I had a soul retrieval a couple of months ago. I felt there was a shadow or a dark cloud that I couldn't get rid of and I was experiencing many problems where I work. There was a warrior inside me that had been fighting to get out. Each time the warrior tried to come up, I would push it back down again. I was struggling because I was so aggressive in the past and I'm so peaceful now. I am learning to fight if I need to fight but I'm learning to do it with dignity. There is a warrior who has joined with my spirit guides. I needed to leave my job and trust that everything was going to be okay.*

*I am spiritually connected now. Soul retrieval has totally changed my life. I have a bumper sticker that says "anticipate miracles," and that is what I do.*

I could sense the inner conviction from Anne's voice as she discussed her connection to the spirit and growth over the years. I honored her experience and strength of character. I spoke with her a few days later and she had found a better position at a new facility. She mentioned it was trust in the spirit that gave her the direction she needed.

### Data Collected from Anne's Interview

#### Causes for Seeking a Soul Retrieval

- 1991 • Painful back injury
- 1992 • Felt something was wrong
- 1998 • Felt a "dark cloud" and needed to leave her job

#### Symptoms

- 1991 • Low self-esteem
  - Aggression
- 1992 • Felt something was wrong
- 1998 • Needed to get in touch

#### Prescribed Rituals and/or Personal Methods for Self-Healing

- 1992 • Joined a drumming group
  - Vision quested
  - Read books on shamanism, learned to journey, practiced shamanic healing

#### Results from the Soul Retrieval

- 1991 • After three days, her back pain was completely cured and has never recurred
  - Felt stronger and more whole
  - Was not afraid to be seen or known by others
  - Felt inner peace
- 1992 • Increased self-awareness
  - Is more peaceful, spiritual, and whole
  - Experiences inner strength

#### Symbols that Represent the Participant's Soul Retrieval

- A tall black shaman woman who provides protection



### Interview with Susan

Susan is a mother of two teenage daughters and has practiced massage therapy for twenty years. She is caucasian and forty-nine years of age. Sarah lives a couple of hours from my home in Oregon and it was difficult to find the time to interview her in person. We agreed to audio tape the interview over the telephone in May, 1998.

#### **Why did you decide to have a soul retrieval?**

*I had a soul retrieval four years ago with Michelle Stringham. It was a time in my life when I felt unsettled. I had recently moved to a new area with my current partner and my two teenage daughters. We had decided to live as a family, but it was the first time he had lived with children. I found myself trying to be an intermediary between them to make their relationship work. I was uncertain about the move and feeling a little lost. I was re-evaluating my life's work and not certain that I wanted to continue to be a massage therapist. It was like my soul and my material world weren't connecting. I wasn't clear that my soul work was to be a healer. I felt massage therapy was a limited form of healing and I didn't know if I could work within that form of healing. I felt I needed direction in my life and I decided to have a soul retrieval.*

*The soul retrieval was a vivid experience of feeling like I was inside a clamshell that opened up and burst forth with an overwhelming message, "I'm a healer, let me out!" There was an image of a brilliant red flower emerging from the clamshell. I felt like it was a healing of my birth trauma, of deciding that it was okay to be here in this world. I had decided to come*

*to this world and it was something I could do. It was like trying to feel the reality of the world and not be too crushed by it.*

**Did the soul retrieval resolve your birth trauma?**

*Yes. It was a healing that resolved the shock of discovering this world was not a place full of unconditional love.*

**Were there any permanent changes that you made as a result of the soul retrieval?**

*Yes, I would say I experienced enhanced self-esteem and a clarity of purpose in my life's direction. It resolved my direction to pursue the healing arts and a redefinition of massage.*

*The second soul retrieval was in March, 1997, one month after my daughter and I were in an automobile accident. It was early in the morning and I was taking my daughter to school. I was distracted and a man pulled out in front of us. We barreled into him and my daughter didn't have on her seat belt. She hit the windshield and both of us were shaken up by it.*

*After the accident I felt I was absent most of the time, that I wasn't 'all here'. I was forgetting all kinds of things and had very low energy. I felt like I was drugged. The other symptom I was having besides feeling absent was nausea. I was often nauseous like during early pregnancy when I would be hungry, then I would eat a little bit and feel nauseous again. It was consistent. I went to see Michelle and she journeyed for me:*

## Journey

My soul was found out in a ditch, in a field by a country road. I was near the car after the accident. I was feeling really fragile and anxious. My partner's power animal was with me, protecting me. I was lost.

*We ended the soul retrieval and in that process I recognized some of my lessons and my fears. I had a fear about my inability to protect my daughter from whatever is 'out there.' I felt there was a message for her to wear her seatbelt and that she was lucky she wasn't hurt. I felt we had our angels with us. After the soul retrieval there was a sense of a warm glow in my body and the nausea was gone. In a couple of days it was totally finished.*

*I was given a ritual to complete the process. Michelle had given me an Apache tear to meditate with. I was to place the anxiety and fear that I experienced from the accident into the tear. It was to represent my feelings of vulnerability while driving around in these machines. I sat with the tear and meditated for a week, then I buried it at the site of the accident near the tree we almost crashed into.*

### **Did you notice any changes after the ritual?**

*Yes. There is a corner of the road that I drive by every day and I noticed that it no longer had a spell on me. I would feel a fear or a chill when I passed by where we had the accident. After the soul retrieval and ritual, I was able to let go of the trauma.*

**Were there any long term benefits from the soul retrieval?**

*Yes. Before the soul retrieval I didn't know which end was up. It brought my presence back into my body and I was able to focus. I was more able to direct the healing process.*

**Is there a symbol or image that represents your experience?**

*Yes, the apache tear symbolized a sorrow that had been put to rest.*

Susan felt she discussed what was most meaningful from her experience.

Although we conducted the interview over the telephone, the importance of the healing came through the sincere tone of her voice. I thanked Susan for her valuable contribution to this study.

## Data Collected from Susan's Interview

### Causes for Seeking a Soul Retrieval

- 1994 • Involved in many life changes and was seeking direction
- 1997 ◦ Suffered trauma from an automobile accident

### Symptoms

- 1994 • Felt lost and uncertain
  - Soul purpose and material world were not connecting
- 1997 • Felt low energy as if drugged
  - Forgetful
  - Experienced nausea

### Prescribed Rituals and/or Methods for Self-Healing

- 1997 ◦ Ritual to place fears and anxieties from the automobile accident into an Apache tear and bury it near the place of the accident

### Results from the Soul Retrieval

- 1994 ◦ Healing of birth trauma
  - Enhanced self-esteem
  - Ability to focus
  - Decided to pursue the healing arts
- 1997 • Relief from nausea
  - Increased self-awareness
  - Relief from fear and trauma from the automobile accident
  - Ability to focus

### Symbols that Represent the Participant's Soul Retrieval

- The Apache tear represents a sorrow that had been laid to rest

## Data Collected from Katherine's Interview (Pilot Study)

### Causes for Seeking a Soul Retrieval

- 1994 • Felt there were parts of herself that were missing
- 1996 • Needed to resolve issues from the past

### Symptoms

- 1994 • Felt disconnected
- 1996 • Experienced depression and anxiety

### Prescribed Rituals and/or Personal Methods for Self-Healing

- 1994 • Joined a women's study group
  - Learned soul retrieval, extractions and other shamanic practices
  - Vision quested
- 1996 • Is able to determine when energy is leaving her body

### Results from the Soul Retrieval

- 1994 • Resolved past issues regarding her divorce
  - Took back her maiden name
  - Realized the need to reconnect the lost parts of herself
- 1996 • Reconnected with family heritage
  - Feels an over-all sense of improved well-being
  - Feels more peaceful and connected
  - Experiences less depression
  - Values her intuition

### Symbols that Represent the Participant's Soul Retrieval

- A live, beating heart

## Data Collected from Marian's Soul Retrievals

### Causes for Seeking a Soul Retrieval

- 1996 • Studying shamanism
- 1997 • Soul retrieval workshop assignment
- 1998 • Writing research paper on soul retrieval

### Symptoms

- Occasional anxiety

### Prescribed Rituals and/or Personal Methods for Self-Healing

- Journey and practice shamanic healing methods
- Dream analysis and journaling
- Read the tarot
- Practice transpersonal approaches to creativity and art

### Results from the Soul Retrieval

- 1996 • Felt a strong sense of inner peace and well-being
- Felt calm, confident, happy and whole
- Increased self-awareness
- Spirits reveal purpose in life to be a healer
- 1997 • Accepted living a full life in the middle world
- Faith in the existence of other worlds
- Began a spiritual counseling practice
- 1998 • Feel calm, confident and connected

### Symbols that Represent the Soul Retrieval

- The bear represents the power of the spirit world
- The cosmic egg for wholeness, creativity, individuality, the soul and the beauty of life

## Thematic Analysis

### Causes for Seeking a Soul Retrieval

The causes for seeking a soul retrieval may occur from experiencing varying degrees of distress from the emotional, physical or spiritual parts of an individual or an individual may be seeking self-awareness.

All of the participants were in a life transition. Robert had recently left a relationship and I was on the path to a new vocation. Anne and Susan were experiencing physical distress. Susan was in an automobile accident and Anne had injured her back from lifting too much weight. Anne felt there was something wrong and Susan had feelings of uncertainty. Katherine felt there were parts of herself that were missing. Robert needed to resolve the issues from his past.

I found from the interviews there was more than one cause or reason for the participants to want a soul retrieval. The participants were motivated to resolve issues from the past, to discover methods for self-healing and to become more whole.

### Symptoms

The participants of this study exhibited symptoms ranging from emotional distress to those caused by accidents. Although the symptoms were unique to each individual, there were a few similarities. Four of the five participants experienced malaise in varying degrees. Robert felt there was something missing. Katherine and Susan sensed they were disconnected while Anne felt a need to get in touch. Within the context of this study, I interpreted this to be an



example of how a missing part of the soul manifests itself as a symptom. Other symptoms such as feeling low energy, feeling something is wrong and feeling lost and uncertain, point the way to the source of the distress. Symptoms such as nausea, aggression, sadness, depression and anxiety aid in characterizing an event or series of events that caused the soul loss.

### **Prescribed Rituals and/or Methods for Self-Healing**

This category combines rituals for healing that are prescribed by the shamanic practitioner as well as methods for self-healing by the participant as a result of the soul retrieval.

A ritual may emerge from the soul retrieval as a result of an interaction with the spirit world. A ritual may also be prescribed by the practitioner in order to provide a bridge to the middle world where the participant can take a more active role in his/her healing. Two of the five participants received a ritual as a direct result of their soul retrieval. Robert collected rocks that represented various issues and after some consideration, released them in a manner that was appropriate to bring closure. Susan was given a ritual to place her fears and anxieties from an automobile accident into an apache tear and bury it near the site of the accident. Through this process both Robert and Susan were given an opportunity to confront their distress in a way that placed the control of their healing in their own hands. This enabled them to dictate the terms of their relationship to the issues and relieve their afflictions.

Katherine, Anne and I found ways to bring balance to our lives through study or dream analysis. All five participants learned how to journey to the spirit world and practice shamanism in varying degrees. Robert learned to journey to

the upper worlds to contact lost family members for closure. Katherine and Anne participated in vision quests. I journey and practice shamanic healing methods. I feel these pursuits are a result of exposure to shamanic practices and have contributed to the long-term effects of soul retrieval.

### **Results from the Soul Retrieval**

The results from the soul retrieval category include immediate results and results that became apparent later as well as long-term results.

This category showed the attributes of soul retrieval by the effect it had on all of the participants. All participants indicated they were better able to focus and noted an increase in self-awareness. Robert expressed this as a shift from the unconscious to the conscious. Katherine learned to value her intuition. The clarity gained was apparent throughout the participant's experience.

An increase in confidence was expressed in many ways. It manifested primarily as enhanced self-esteem and feeling more able to deal with personal issues. Anne was no longer afraid to be seen or known by others and I discovered a new faith in other worlds. Katherine has less depression and Robert developed new methods for dealing with anger. The soul retrieval enabled the participants to be more effective when challenged.

It is sometimes difficult to face the memory of an event that caused soul loss; however, in finding and embracing the returned soul, a new and immediate sense of wholeness is experienced. The theme of wholeness emerged prominently within the study and was described in terms of feeling reconnected and more complete. Katherine realized she needed to reconnect the lost parts of herself. Robert felt more complete as a direct result of the soul retrieval and I felt

calm, confident, happy and whole. Anne described her experience as feeling more peaceful, spiritual and whole. The descriptions indicated that a greater sense of well-being was experienced by all participants.

All participants noticed feeling more peaceful. Robert felt more calm and Anne had inner peace. Katherine and I felt peaceful and more connected. Susan was able to let go of the fear and trauma from the automobile accident. I felt that the increased sense of inner peace experienced by the participants helped them as they worked through painful issues.

The participants were able to resolve issues from their pasts. Katherine resolved the issues from her divorce and took back her maiden name. From her 1996 soul retrieval she reconnected with her family heritage. Susan and Robert were able to find closure with their past. Robert resolved issues regarding the loss of his family and Susan ventured deeply into her past to heal her birth trauma. These experiences indicate that soul retrieval is an effective healing method for resolving issues from the past.

Two of the participants were physically healed from their soul retrieval. Susan was no longer nauseous. Anne stated that her back pain was totally gone within three days of her soul retrieval and has never felt discomfort in her back in the seven years since.

Soul retrieval influenced the vocation of two participants. During my first soul retrieval, the spirits revealed my purpose in life was to be a healer. As a result of my soul retrieval the following year, I began a spiritual counseling practice. Susan's 1994 soul retrieval provided the necessary direction for her to pursue her role as a healer.

The most significant results from this study are:

- Enhanced ability to focus
- Increased self-awareness
- Confidence and inner-strength
- Feeling inner peace and an improved sense of well-being
- Feeling whole, reconnected and complete
- Able to resolve issues from the past
- Inspired to make life changes
- Relief from physical symptoms

### Symbols

The symbols represent the participant's soul retrieval experiences. The meanings of the symbols are personal to the participants. I found them interesting to reflect on as symbols that describe the soul retrieval experience.

Katherine	A live beating heart
Robert	Walking through a doorway or threshold that represents another world and feeling safe  A celtic sword that represents ancestral power and the ability to be effective in the world
Anne	A tall black shaman woman who provides protection
Susan	An Apache tear that represents a sorrow which was laid to rest
Marian	The bear that represents the power of the spirit world  The egg, representing wholeness, creativity, individuality, the soul and the beauty of life

**Table I: Thematic Analysis**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
Increased Confidence	5
Increased Self-Awareness	5
Feelings of Inner-Peace	5
Greater Sense of Wholeness	4
Resolved Past Issues	3
Pursued New Vocation	3
Relief from Physical Symptoms	2

### Discussion

The enthusiasm I had for conducting this study was a direct result of the effect soul retrieval has had on my life. I was impressed by the immediate results and over time I found the changes I made were permanent. The transformative effects of the soul retrieval fueled a desire to know the stories others had to tell. I felt it was important for the stories of others to be shared and found that the participants benefitted by reviewing their experiences.

I feel there is a real need for the practice of shamanism and its teachings. The soul retrieval begins a process that invites the participant to play an active role in his or her own healing. The inquiry into this ancient practice provides vast opportunities for deeper understanding of our role in this world and provides us with methods for self-discovery. It should be understood that the soul retrieval process is not only for the ailing. As part of the human condition, no matter how fortunate or well adjusted we are, we always have a hunger to

know more.

The results from Glenn (1995), Morris (1995), and this study have shown positive outcomes for soul retrieval and power animal retrieval. The short-term effects of soul retrieval from Glenn's study showed an increase in energy, self-esteem, wholeness and empowerment. The results from Morris' study showed an increase in empowerment and self-worth, a reconnection to spirituality and feelings of unity, feeling peaceful, and a greater ability to face fears and challenges. My study supports the findings of Glenn and is similar to Morris. The participants felt stronger and more confident. Feelings of wholeness and inner peace were evident. In addition to the other finding there was an enhanced ability to focus, relief from physical symptoms, an ability to resolve issues from the past and a willingness to change direction in life. All participants experienced less depression as a result of soul retrieval and the feeling of inner peace gave the ability to be more effective when challenged. Being actively involved in the healing process through ritual or a spiritual practice such as shamanic journeying contributed to the long-term benefits of soul retrieval. This facilitated the integration of lost essence and unconscious content and increased self-awareness.

The interview questions were designed to follow the guidelines from qualitative methodology and case study interviews. I felt they enabled the participants to focus on what was meaningful from their experiences. All participants had exceptional memories concerning their soul retrievals and some referred to their notes during the interview. The openness and honesty of the participants greatly contributed to the authenticity of this study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The size of this study is limited; therefore, I cannot make general statements on the benefits of soul retrieval to the greater population. However, I think it is important to consider the value of small studies which show similar results.

The shamanic healer had been practicing for twenty years which contributed to her abilities to be a successful practitioner. She also chose the participants to interview; they were not randomly selected for the study. The participants were from a similar socio-economic background and were forty-nine to fifty years old.

### **Suggestions for other Studies**

It would be interesting to conduct a similar study with a younger and older age sample, such as people who are twenty-five to thirty-five, and sixty to ninety-five years of age. It would be interesting to explore the issues that arise and compare the experiences across the group.

A cross-cultural study is necessary to understand the effects of soul retrieval around the world. How does a soul retrieval in a western culture compare to one given in an indigenous one? Is the procedure the same? How do the issues and results differ?

A study on the effects of should retrieval and coma patients would be incredibly valuable as would a study on the effects of extractions and soul retrieval on patients with long-term illnesses or life-threatening illnesses.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

My intention was to focus on the effects of soul retrieval over seven years and consider the themes the participants shared in common. The results from this study show the long-term benefits of soul retrieval. The soul retrievals set in motion a chain of events that affected the direction of the participant's lives in a fundamental way. The results show the changes and positive outcomes that were made as a direct result of soul retrieval. The benefits of soul retrieval will continue to play a role in all of the participants' lives.



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**Appendix**  
**Research Participation Agreement**

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study concerning the effects of soul retrieval over a two year period. I am writing this research paper for my masters degree for the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, Ca. You will be asked to share your experience of soul retrieval and any changes that may have occurred as a result of this procedure. I am including a list of questions to help you recall the experiences that were meaningful to you. These are meant to be guidelines. The interview will be conducted as a dialogue with emphasis on acquiring a full understanding of the effects of soul retrieval. Please understand that I honor the interview as a personal experience and you are not obligated to share any aspect that is uncomfortable.

With your permission I will conduct a one hour interview with you at the location of your choice. The interview will be audio taped. For the protection of your privacy, all information pertaining to your identity will be kept confidential. I will send you a copy of the interview for your verification. Please feel free to make any corrections, omissions or adjustments you feel is necessary and return it to me within four days. Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time, for any reason, without prejudice. If you would like to receive a copy of the research findings, please let me know.

## Research Participation and Confidentiality Agreement

(To be signed and returned after reading the attached form)

I attest that I have read and understood this form and had any questions about this research answered to my satisfaction. My signature indicates my willingness to be a participant in this study and to have the results published. I understand that in any published material, I will remain anonymous.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address (if you want a summary of the research findings):

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Please mail to : Marian Simon

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