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ELIZABETH KELLY: CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL TEACHER AND HEALER

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Roseanne Rini, B.S. Ed., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1997

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Approved by
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1997
ABSTRACT

Feminist scholars use oral history research to document the lives of women, lives that have been left out of traditional historical accounts. This dissertation is an oral history study of the life and teachings of Elizabeth Kelly, a spiritual teacher and healer who lives in Yellow Springs, Ohio. My goal was to learn how she came to the role of spiritual teacher and healer and in doing so to contribute to knowledge of women in healing roles, their spiritual lives and life stories.

Drawing upon social science methods such as ethnography and life history, I conducted interviews with Elizabeth Kelly which are the basis of two narrative chapters illuminating, in her own words, the ways she came to occupy her current role. I then analyze Elizabeth Kelly's life story from two perspectives: a feminist perspective, which examines the constraints that gender put upon her and her strategies for finding power and fulfillment within those constraints, particularly through the evolution of the role of teacher and healer; and a religious perspective, which looks at her life story and her taking on this role as a recovery narrative or a story of conversion. These two
narratives not only illustrate different ways of "writing a woman’s life," but also the differences between some feminist and religious perspectives.

The study places Elizabeth Kelly in a tradition of women’s healing and also examines her use of storytelling in perpetuating her world view. By inquiring into the ways that Elizabeth Kelly’s world view and spiritual teachings may be compatible with feminism, especially with feminist spirituality, I show how the spiritual life can be a source of empowerment for women.
Dedicated to Pat
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Note to the Reader</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. From This Distance in Time:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Reminiscence by Elizabeth Kelly</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Making of a Spiritual Teacher and Healer</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Part 1: A Feminist Perspective</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2: A Religious Perspective</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Faith Stories</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Elizabeth Kelly and Women’s Healing</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conclusion</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

viii
INTRODUCTION

I met Elizabeth Kelly in the fall of 1982. I had just taken my first academic job as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where I was teaching courses in literature and women’s studies. Yellow Springs, a village in southwest Ohio with a population of less than 5000, was a good place for me to be at this time in my life, a time shaped by my growing interest in feminism and the interdisciplinary field of women’s studies, as well as by personal spiritual exploration, mostly of Eastern mysticism and New Age1 philosophies rather than the Christian, specifically Catholic, tradition in which I had been raised.

Yellow Springs has a long heritage as a place of freedom and individual expression. It was once the site of a health spa and later a utopian community. It had also been "a way-station in the underground railroad," and "one of the first Ohio towns to desegregate its schools" (Yellow Springs 1987). A pamphlet by the Yellow Springs Chamber of Commerce states, "Yellow Springs is an intentional community, where people live because they want to be here" (Yellow Springs 1988). Reiterating this theme, Kent
Bristol, Village Manager, said in an interview,

People have to want to live here. . . . The people who live next door to you are likely to be unconventional in some way, even if it's just their dietary habits. A person who comes to live here has to be adventuresome. It's not a place where everybody is the same (Sloat 12).

Alternative lifestyles are evident in the active New Age community in Yellow Springs, which offers health food stores, a metaphysical bookshop, yoga classes and meditation groups. As an Ohio travel guide says, "Yellow Springs is uniquely itself, a village with a broad sense of democracy that encourages a diversity of lifestyles and a rare personal freedom" (Particular Places 3-4).

The village derives much of its reputation from Antioch College, founded in the 1850's by Horace Mann as "an experiment in egalitarian education. . . . Mann's idea that people should be educated without restrictions based on their gender, color or creed was considered radical in his day. . . ." (Particular Places 82). My experience of teaching at Antioch reflected this legacy. Classes were small, encouraging group discussion and personal interaction between faculty and students, who were often on first-name basis with one another. Students tended to be independent in
their thinking, and unafraid of voicing their thoughts and ideas, or of challenging authority. They received no grades, but rather written evaluations and course credit if they had met course requirements. All of this tended to break down the usual hierarchies that exist in American education. In addition, Antioch students are politically aware and committed. Engaging with these students, especially in my women's studies courses, contributed to the excitement, challenge and sense of discovery that characterized my experience there, and shaped the way I have approached teaching ever since.

In a casual conversation after class one day, a student brought up the subjects of homeopathy and holistic health. She also happened to mention Liz Kelly, "a psychic in town" who did Tarot readings. I had always been curious about the "occult." This interest, combined with my growing feminism, and the fact that I was looking for direction but was disillusioned with both religion and conventional psychotherapy, contributed to my decision to make an appointment for a reading, something I had never in my life done before. The uniqueness of this experience seemed to be captured in the fact that, when I called to make an appointment, and was about to give my name, Liz said, "That won't be necessary."

When I arrived, her husband answered the door. I was directed into the dining room where she was seated at the
head of a long, lacquered blue table on which were arranged several artifacts, pictures, crystals, books, papers and a cup of water. Incense was burning; music was playing in the background. I sat down at the table. "The most important thing," she began, "is to realize that the universe exists within God, like an egg within a shell, and that there is literally nothing that is separate." This was the first sentence, and it is always the first sentence, of the little lesson she gave me before she began the reading. She talked like this for a few minutes, instructing me in the spiritual life. Though I felt somewhat awkward at being given a private lecture or sermon, I did find what she said to be very appealing: "In a world where ninety per cent of the suffering is unintentional, to become harmless is no small achievement."

At some point after this brief talk, she handed me a deck of cards and told me to concentrate, shuffle them and make a wish. She cautioned me not to put too much energy into the wish because then it would become "an intention." At the time, this distinction was not clear to me, but I was very attracted to her perspective. She then laid out the cards. In the reading itself she did seem to be uncannily aware of many of my difficulties, and gave me much encouragement. She recommended that I read Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda, and Joy's Way, by Dr. Brugh Joy. At the end of the reading she said, "Is there
anything you would like to ask me?" I told her about the sudden death, the week before, of my cat, a beloved friend of eleven years. She said she had a cat that needed a home. Though I was reluctant to take it, I finally agreed. "You can heal together," she said. When I left her house, carrying the little black cat in my arms, and got into my car, I felt I had somehow stepped into another dimension. Apart from the wise counsel she had given me, she had just happened to have what I needed.

The experience of meeting Elizabeth Kelly did indeed have a profound effect on me. Not long after this encounter I began attending Wednesday night "healing meetings" which she conducted at Rockford Chapel, a Quaker meeting house on the Antioch campus. At these gatherings once a week Liz would give a short talk and then guide us through a meditation. We would then stand, join hands and sing "Oh God Beautiful," a hymn written by Paramahansa Yogananda. At the conclusion of the song, people would call out the names of individuals who needed healing, and the group would repeat the name three times. Finally we would chant Om, and the group would disperse. I would always return from these meetings feeling energized and uplifted. Over the ensuing years I continued to see Liz for occasional readings and to attend the service at Rockford Chapel. Even after I left Yellow Springs in 1985, I maintained my connection with her and she has continued to be an important influence.
Indeed, Elizabeth Kelly has had a profound impact on the lives of many individuals, and is well known, both in and outside Yellow Springs, as an "enlightened teacher" and spiritual counselor. She has in fact been included in a history of the area. A recent article, entitled "The Wise Woman of Yellow Springs," reveals her reputation:

Entering the modest house on Red Brick Lane (sic) in Yellow Springs, Ohio, one senses immediately that here lives a very special person. Surrounded by mementos of a long life lived in service to those who would find their way to her door, Elizabeth Kelly operates now from an easy chair. Her teachings and influence, however, have spread beyond the confines of her little house and have brightened the path of many a student at nearby Antioch College, as well as many from surrounding areas, including Cincinnati. Sophia Paparodis has been driving up every month for years, just to tap into Liz's wisdom. "I never grow tired of hearing her teachings," says Sophia, "because they're so profound" (Collins 7).

Liz does Tarot readings in her home and always seems to be on call. I have never been to her home when someone has not called or dropped by or been on the way out as I arrived. People are often willing to travel some distance
to see her. On the last Saturday of every month, she lectures at the Epic Bookshop on "creative dreaming." Up until the last few years, when her health made it too difficult, she would conduct meetings at Rockford Chapel every Wednesday night. Liz has also spoken on the Antioch Campus Forum, has been broadcast for public radio, and has been invited as a speaker outside of Yellow Springs.

In 1987, friends of hers transcribed talks she had given weekly from 1975 through 1978 and published them in a book called _Spiritual Journey: How to Get Through the Day_. Though it was first available only in Yellow Springs, it is now being sold at metaphysical bookstores in Dayton and Columbus, as well as outside of Ohio. The first printing of five hundred copies sold out in a few months. She then had two-thousand more printed. By February of 1995, as of this writing, these too are almost gone. An ad for _Spiritual Journey_ in a newspaper published in Milford, Ohio, describes it as "a book of wisdom from an intuitively gifted counselor." The advertisement includes the following quote from a reader: "I turn to this book when I don’t know where else to turn" (_New Lifestyles_ 15).

Liz also has a wide correspondence, both with friends she’s known for years and people she’s never met, who know of her through _Spiritual Journey_. People write to order copies of the book, to request a reading or other advice, or most often, simply to express their love, gratitude and
admiration. I learned about this correspondence quite by accident, when one day her husband asked, "Did you tell Roseanne about that letter?" Dipping into a huge leather bag full of notes, cards and letters that she keeps next to her chair at the dining room table, she pulled out a message thanking her for her help and informing her that her book had been "making the rounds" in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in Dayton. Liz allowed me to read this correspondence, and would often send me home with the latest installment. A sampling reveals the recurring theme of her importance in her clients' and readers' lives:

"Your book is a comfort."
"You help me stay optimistic."
"You are everyone's sunshine. Your voice is a source of comfort and love."
"I bow to you for all the help to me over the years."
"You are a real blessing; thank you for the wise counsel."
"You have brought love and light into my life."
"You have always been there for me."
"You are like a light in the storm."
"I need your reassurance that I'm going to succeed. Your opinion of my situation means a lot to me."
"It is a joy to hear your voice; I always feel better afterwards. I understand a bit more after I talk to you."
"You are a living, loving saint. I read a line from
your book when I'm lost and you help me find my way. You are the guiding light for so many."

"You have been so much help to me."

"I have your booklet on my nightstand & I look at your saintly, beautiful smile nightly!"

In these communications, Elizabeth Kelly emerges as an invaluable source of comfort, inspiration and spiritual guidance to many individuals in Ohio and around the country.

Through my work in women's studies I have come to believe in the value and importance of "research by, about and for women" (Gluck and Patai 2). When the idea for this project came to me in 1989, I felt I had found a way to integrate my interests in women's studies, literature, and religion. Through this research I would also, I hoped, be contributing to knowledge about women’s lives, particularly about women’s spiritual lives and the lives of women healers. As Merrill Singer and Roberto Garcia write,

Unfortunately, despite a longstanding anthropological interest in the healer role, there is a paucity of detailed biographies of female healers. . . . life history materials can provide a rich corpus of data for understanding the pathway to the healer role within a particular sociocultural context (Singer and Garcia
The work I present here is an oral history which draws upon social science methods such as ethnography and life history, but which also needs to be distinguished from them. As Sherna Gluck explains, the method of oral history was first developed by Allan Nevins in 1948:

With the advent of the telephone, and the decline in the practice of journal writing and lengthy correspondence, historians were faced with a "drying up" of many of the sources on which they traditionally depended. Oral history, emerging then as the sound recording of the reminiscences of public figures, was hailed as a method which could create alternative sources (Gluck 1977,3).

Feminist scholars have since come to see that oral history, which had been used primarily to document the lives of "famous" individuals or those associated with public events, could also be used effectively to document the lives of "ordinary" women, lives that we do not know much about. Oral histories are also of value to feminist scholars because they give a voice to women who might otherwise be silenced, and in doing so not only help to create women's history, but serve to empower individual
women by making them visible to themselves and others. Women who participated in an oral history project on volunteerism reported that it had "helped [them] change their sense of themselves and other women," and made them realize that "their 'ordinary' lives were of interest to scholars" (Mercier and Murphy 184-185). Fran Leeper Buss's book, *Dignity: Lower Income Women Tell of Their Lives and Struggles*, for example, which I had used in my introduction to women's studies courses, brings home powerfully the issues of many women's lives, while at the same time reveals the uniqueness of a particular consciousness and the individual resources each woman drew upon not only to endure, but also to make sense of her life.

Elizabeth Kelly is an "ordinary" woman in the sense that she has lived primarily within the traditional confines of a white, middle-class woman's life: she is married, has four grown sons and several grandchildren, and has not, until she began her spiritual teaching and counseling approximately thirty years ago, when she was in her fifties, worked outside the home. Yet she has managed to carve out a public life outside of any institution and she has had a powerful effect on the lives of many individuals. How did she learn what she teaches and how did she find ways to communicate that knowledge? How did she come to serve others as she does? What can her story, like those in *Dignity*, tell us about women's lives in our society,
especially women’s spiritual lives? How is the nature of Liz’s role in the community as teacher, counselor and healer connected to the fact that she is female? Conversely, how does her female role affect her work? And, considering that most of her clients are women, does her instruction reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles? These are some of the questions that guided my study, which from the beginning has been a feminist project.

As Sherna Gluck argues,

Women’s oral history. . . is a feminist encounter, even if the interviewee is not a feminist. It is the creation of a new type of material on women; it is the validation of women’s experiences; it is the communication among women of different generations; it is the discovery of our own roots and the development of a continuity which has been denied us in traditional historical accounts (Gluck 1977, 5).

Carol Shepherd McClain, in a more recent study, reiterates this point when she states that the study of women healers "reflects. . . a feminist concern with documenting women’s lives and their contributions to culture" (McClain 21).

Today the term feminist has become problematic, and it is more accurate to speak of feminisms rather than feminism. As Laurel Richardson explains,
The contemporary women’s movement is built upon the idea of "alliances," rather than the universalized and essentialized identity, "woman." The underlying premise of the contemporary movement is that "whereas some women have some common interests and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal; rather they are interlaced with differences, even with conflicts" (Fraser and Nicholson 102 qtd. in Richardson 55).

While we no longer assume the commonalities among women that we did in the early days of the women’s movement and of women’s studies, the word "feminist" can still be used to describe the valuing of women and what women do in the context of a society in which women are often devalued and subordinated. The questions with which I approached this project, both in the interviews and in the analysis, reflect this basic assumption.

Like ethnography, the description of culture, oral history is based on field interviews and attempts to place an individual within the context of her or his culture. But the emphasis in autobiographical oral history, especially in the hands of humanities researchers like myself, is more on the individual herself and the interpretation of her particular texts than on the culture she is seen to
represent (Personal Narratives Group 10). The oral history also has much in common with the anthropological life history in that "it should reflect the experiences, values, attitudes, and relationships of the interviewee—the patterns and rhythms of her life and times" (Gluck 1977,5). But it also differs from this method in important ways:

The interview is a transaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, and their responses to each other form the basis for the creation of the oral history. Each woman has her own style of recollecting, as well as her own specific experiences. As sensitive interviewers, we respond to each individually, and the interview process will therefore vary. This variability is one of the most distinctive features of the oral history interview and is what makes it different from the standardized interviews used by social scientists (Gluck 1977,9).

I began interviewing Elizabeth Kelly in March of 1989. The most intensive interviews took place over the next two years, and the project is largely based on this material. However I continue, even now, to tape our conversations and to draw from them whenever material relevant to the project surfaces. I have also drawn from her public talks and private readings and from Spiritual Journey. I have tended
to treat all of these contexts alike as sources of information about Liz’s life and her message. In a sense this work is ongoing. One makes an arbitrary decision that it is "finished," knowing it never really is. As Ruth Behar writes, "There is no true version of a life" (Behar 235).

Although I did not use standardized questions, I did follow Fran Leeper Buss’s lead in covering the following issues, many of which relate to the life cycle of women in contemporary American society:

. . .family, cultural, and economic background and its effect on her
The circumstances of her birth and childhood, as well as the history of her mother, father, and grandmother
Childhood goals, friends, mentors, and perception of life; and understanding of life
Menarche and adolescence as they related to her personally, with friends, and in terms of cultural expectations
Her marriage . . . : its problems, strengths, and differences from what she had expected
Her experiences as a mother. . .
Any experiences of incest, rape, battering, sexual harassment, etc.
Her work and economic life

Issues dealing with old age (Buss 2).

Because I was especially interested in how she had evolved her current role, and what influence gender had had on this process, I added to this list questions about her education, her spiritual history, her current spiritual beliefs and the influences that shaped her current work. Liz summarized our goal at the outset as telling the story of "how [she] came to spiritual endeavor."

When I began the interviews in 1989 I was, I now realize, somewhat naive. I wanted to collect Elizabeth Kelly's life story to learn how she came to her spiritual ministry and to discover what influence gender had had on her life's direction. But I was not entirely aware at the time of the complex ethical issues that feminist scholars doing oral history research have begun to wrestle with, issues that anthropologists have long been aware of. As Judith Stacey writes,

Postmodern ethnography is critical and self-reflexive ethnography and has created a literature of meditation on the inherent, but often unacknowledged, hierarchical and power-laden relations of ethnographic writing (Stacey 115).
These "power-laden relations" are especially apparent when privileged white middle-class North American feminists conduct research about Third World Women who speak a language different from their own. But even in a project like mine, in which one middle class white woman who was born in the United States and speaks English interviews and writes about another English-speaking woman of the same class and race, (though of different ages and backgrounds), a project in which I was not "interviewing across cultural boundaries" (Gluck and Patai 3), power imbalances are present and must be acknowledged.

Several issues are of special concern to me: first, the intervention, unbidden, into the interviewee's life; second, the "implicit inequality" of researcher and researched; third, the imposing of a feminist agenda; and fourth, issues of authorship, that is, the control and presentation of the text. All of these issues are subtly intertwined.

Karen Olson and Linda Shopes suggest that ". . . we assert power by inserting ourselves into [our subjects'] world unbidden and asking for their stories. . . ." (Olson and Shopes 196). But because I had known Liz for seven years before I began this project, I was already, in a sense, part of her world. The interviews easily became a part of the relationship we already had; indeed, they represented a deepening and enriching of that relationship. Though I used a tape recorder, took notes, and asked questions, most of
the time the interviews resembled conversations. They took place in the context of an extended visit in which we were, as Liz often said, having "a happy time," enjoying each other's company.

And they were, indeed, happy times. Usually I would spend the night, arriving at about three or four in the afternoon. Sometimes I arranged to have dinner with a friend downtown so as not to be a burden, but often Liz would invite me to dinner and have something already prepared when I arrived. She and her husband, Bob, extended me the warmest hospitality, opening their home to me as though I were one of the family.

Often when I arrived Liz was seated at the table where she does readings, so it was easy to place the tape recorder before her and simply switch it on as soon as I sat down. Other times, she would sit in her chair in the living room and I would prop the tape recorder on a table beside her while I sat on the other side, papers and notes balanced in my lap. And we would talk. Periodically the phone would ring and Liz would do counselling or make appointments for readings. Friends would drop by frequently and sit down to visit. The dog, Tiki, and the cat, Honey-Bee, wandered in and out, their antics providing many topics for conversation and occasions for laughter. The parrot, Aku, could be heard from the kitchen, calling Liz or Bob, imitating various household sounds, or shouting, "Hooray for the Irish! Root
for old Notre Dame!" as he'd been taught to by Bob, a loyal Notre Dame alumnus. And throughout the day, Bob would, from time to time, consult with Liz about household business or errands.

At around five o'clock Bob would come into the dining room or wherever we were taping and ask, "Would you like a glass of sherry?" Though Liz would never partake, this established a festive atmosphere in which there was always much laughter and mutual enjoyment. A mood would be created that carried easily into the next day. Mornings I would always be the first one to rise. I would creep out to the kitchen, where, invariably, Bob would have set out for me cereal, coffeecake, instant coffee, a bowl, cup and plate, and a note: "Orange juice in the fridge. Help yourself to whatever. Love, B." I would go back to my room with my coffee until I heard sounds of activity. Then I'd come out and join Liz for breakfast. I'd turn on the tape recorder, and we would continue.

The interviews were thus conducted amidst the business of everyday life, yet there was always an intensity to them too, marked by the presence of the tape recorder, my close attention to Liz's words, and her involvement in what she was saying. A wonderful intimacy developed in the course of these visits. By the time I would get ready to leave, at around three o'clock of the second day, I was usually exhausted from the intensity of the encounter, but energized
and excited as well. I would always have a sense, not only of having collected interesting material for the project, but also of increased closeness to Liz. Hence, this work has been far more than a scholarly endeavor, but a significant personal experience as well that has, I think, been enriching to both of us.

If there was an "implicit inequality" between us, Liz was in the more powerful role, at least initially, because she had so often been in the position of advising me and already knew much more about me than I did about her. Though I knew her in her public role as teacher, and whatever she'd chosen to reveal about herself in that context or in the context of a reading, I knew little about her personal life. Furthermore, she has a public identity in Yellow Springs, is respected, indeed revered by many, while I was one of her students. In addition, because of her public role as spiritual teacher, I already knew her values and beliefs, her world view, before I began the interviews and so many of the concerns of the interviews were shaped by the public persona she has created rather than being entirely imposed by me. Olson and Shopes point out that often those we interview are from "a self-selected group, and so are perhaps those with the strongest sense of self, who are publicly available, and for whom a frank account of aspects of their lives is not especially threatening" (Olsen and Shopes 196). This is definitely
true of Liz, who is used to the role of public performer and is unintimidated by tape recorders.

The implicit inequality between researcher and researched is most apparent in my imposing of a feminist agenda on the interviews, in the presentation of the text and in the act of interpretation or analysis that any academic project requires. When I first approached Liz with the idea for this project, explaining that I was interested in her life as a woman and in her spiritual history, she said, "It might help." That is the best way to describe her agenda: to help others, especially women, to see that "difficulties can be overcome." Her story will, she hopes, serve as inspiration. In discussing the value of the project during one interview in October of 1990, she said,

I think that women gain a great deal of encouragement from finding that other women have faced very difficult things and not only survived but gained from the experience and have become free of it. So that instead of any kind of suffering being seen as some kind of unsupportable burden, it becomes a basis from which you can move on to something more.

As she agreed to do the project with me, she suddenly noticed the music to "Oh God, Beautiful," the hymn sung at her healing meetings, on her cassette player. "Wouldn't you
know that would be playing!" she said. This "meaningful coincidence," what Jung called "synchronicity," marked this moment as highly significant for both of us. Liz was implying that the project would be a testimony to the workings of the divine: not only would it, she hoped, inspire faith, but its very existence would be evidence of providence. As Swamiji, the Hindu sage Kirin Narayan wrote about, said of Narayan's work, "You might think that you came here for your own benefit, . . ., but it was for Himself that the Lord sent you here" (Narayan 58).

While I shared this sense of the larger meaning of our work together, I was also there for my own benefit. My concern throughout with her life as a woman and with the gender issues raised by both her story and her message was my agenda rather than hers. In shaping my questions and my interpretation according to a feminist analysis, that is, an analysis of the ways that gender shaped and often constrained her life as well as the strategies by which she gained a measure of power within those constraints, was I helping Liz to tell the story of "how difficulties can be overcome," was I bearing witness to the workings of the divine, in her life and by implication in the life of every individual, or was I using her story to answer my own questions? As Daphne Patai asks, "Is it empowerment or is it appropriation?" (Patai 147) The Personal Narratives group argues, "Whether she has accepted the norms or defied
them, a woman’s life can never be written taking gender for granted" (Personal Narratives Group 5). But, as Sondra Hale writes, "following one’s own agenda is . . . a potential negation of the empowerment process of the feminist biographer/interpreter/facilitator" (Hale 131).

Sherna Berger Gluck states, "the best oral histories are those that achieve a balance between the narrator’s agenda and the interviewer’s agenda--agendas that are, at times, disparate" (Gluck 1991, 208). She makes a useful distinction between "women’s consciousness," that is, "consciousness of women themselves as a group and awareness of their own power and of the collectivity that is derived from their traditional roles," and "feminist consciousness," that is, "a consciousness [of women] about their own oppression" (Gluck 1991, 218). Early on, Liz said about the project, "What I hope would come out of it is that everybody can realize their potential for healing. Because it’s all women have been doing for centuries." I believe that in this statement, and in others like it in which Liz discusses "women" (prompted, most likely by what she knew of my interests and concerns), she is reflecting "women’s consciousness." This consciousness is stronger in her discourse than "feminist consciousness," but it is still secondary to her spiritual concerns and the spiritual message she wants to convey. Despite my interest in gender issues and in my feminist agenda, Liz always managed to
communicate her message of unity. The results of the interviews reflect our combined interests and goals.

The Personal Narratives Group reminds us, "While the interpreter may have thought of herself or himself in some sense as a student during the exchange with the narrator, that role changed dramatically as soon as the actual production of the text began" (Personal Narratives Group 203). The researcher must acknowledge the power she/he asserts in the control and presentation of the text. The text that I produced and present here is in Liz Kelly's words, but I took certain editorial liberties with it. For example, I dropped frequent ands or you knows; I separated some independent clauses in sentences and allowed them to stand as complete sentences on their own and combined others for emphasis or clarity; I sometimes completed incomplete sentences, but when I did so, I put the completion in brackets; I sometimes dropped conjunctions like because, but, or so for greater emphasis.

Perhaps more important, the texts I produced in the first and second chapters, which constitute continuous narratives, are composite texts. I come to this work from a background in literature and, while I wanted to document Elizabeth Kelly's story in her own words, I also wanted to produce a coherent narrative, an inclination that reveals my Western literary bias. As Langness and Frank state,
We expect a biography to present a unified life through anecdotes that reveal this unity while, at the same time, demonstrating change or growth. In autobiography and biography, Westerners make a story out of a life, telling it chronologically from early childhood on, ferreting out the subject's own feelings and interpretations of events, and centering it around a moral paradigm of cause and effect (Langness and Frank 101).

"The need to build this kind of coherence into life stories," they add, "comes from rules underlying the structure of narratives and thought in English" (Langness and Frank 107-8). As James Clifford writes, commenting on Marjorie Shostak's life history of Nisa, "Nisa's life brings into play a potent and pervasive mechanism for the production of meaning in the West--the exemplary, coherent self (or rather, the self pulling itself together in autobiography)" (Clifford 106).

In a postmodern age, however, "the self as a coherent and unified producer of truth and meaning" (Gilmore 21) is no longer assumed. Every one of us has numerous selves that we shift in and out of depending on the contexts in which we find ourselves and the languages and discourses through which we speak. Any narrative about our lives will include certain details and exclude others, depending on what is
encouraged or forbidden expression by the dominant ideologies of our culture and on the impression we wish to create (Bergland 131). And our narrative is always open to interpretation. There is more than one way to tell a life, and more than one way to interpret that telling.

I acknowledge that the "coherence" of the narrative I have produced and of the Elizabeth Kelly I interpret through it are fictions. I present one view, asking the reader to accept this portrayal as one of many possible portrayals, and one itself open to other interpretations besides my own. In this sense, my use of oral history bears a closer relationship to literature than to history, and my interpretation of it a closer relationship to literary criticism, albeit an old-fashioned kind, characterized by thematic analysis and close reading of the text, than to social science.

Most important, perhaps, is to note the process by which I derived meaning in the texts I have produced here. Michael Frisch, in calling for greater critical reflection about oral history, raises these important questions:

At what distance, in what ways, for what reasons, and in what patterns do people generalize, explain and interpret experience? What cultural and historical categories do individuals use to help understand and present a view of experience (Frisch 11)?

26
These questions are relevant not only in thinking about the ways Elizabeth Kelly has reflected upon her experience, and on the role memory has played, but also about the ways in which I edited and interpreted those reflections.

Elizabeth Kelly's reflections were filtered through memory as she looked back on a life of almost eighty years. As Bertram J. Cohler writes, "'self-consistency' or 'cohesiveness' of the life history are essential to mental health" (Cohler 206), and "feelings of fragmentation or personal disintegration are most likely to occur if such coherence cannot be maintained" (Cohler 215). Crises and traumatic experiences must somehow be integrated into one's current life story. Further, as Cohler writes, "across adulthood, earlier memories are continually revised as a function of subsequent experiences" (Cohler 211).

Elizabeth Kelly discussed her life in light of the sense she had made of it at the point of the interviews. As I try to show in Chapter Three, Part Two, in which I discuss a religious perspective on her life story, seeing her life in terms of a larger spiritual purpose has enabled her to integrate painful experiences and to give an emphasis and interpretation to certain memories that perhaps she would not have given at an earlier point.

In addition to the filtering process created by the workings of memory was that created by my own process of editing the transcriptions. The interviews, which extended
over a lengthy period, naturally involved some repetition and disorganization. Creating a continuous or coherent narrative meant removing my questions as well as editing the transcriptions and imposing an order upon what I selected out. As Clifford writes, again commenting on Shostak's work, "... one cannot have everything--the performance with all its divagations, and also an easily understandable story" (Clifford 106). But such editing cannot be separated from interpretation. What narrative pattern, what literary expectations, informed my selection and arrangement of her words, and most important, is this pattern consistent with Liz's sense of her own life?

Elizabeth Kelly's story can, from a feminist perspective, be told as a woman's search for power and fulfillment in a patriarchal society, and, from a religious perspective, as a woman's search for spiritual enlightenment and purpose. The first two chapters thus suggest two different ways her story can be told. "Reading [her] life backward," in James Hillman's phrase (Hillman 7), I edited the interviews, largely on the basis of chronology, to show, in the first narrative chapter, how gender issues interacted with the events of her life to direct her to her current role and in the second narrative chapter, how her spiritual history interacted with those events to direct her to this role. As Langness and Frank write, aptly describing my own process,
The coherence displayed in the life of a person in biography resembles fictional characterization. Biographers as a rule find some pattern in the life of their subject or develop a vivid impression of the person that they keep in mind while writing. Generally, the subject of a biography has a much more coherent, organized life than people in real life seem to experience. Biographers begin with the pattern and supplement it with anecdotal material (Langness and Frank 104).

Liz describes her process as the story of her coming to awareness, rather than coming to power, but she has never taken issue with my construction of it. Repeatedly she has said she is happier now than she has ever been. In her view, the reason is that she has "given up all expectation and concentrated on service." From a feminist perspective the reason could be that she now has a public life, has found a measure of power and recognition as well as economic independence and is no longer confined by the domestic sphere. These two interpretations can both be true in that, as Gerda Lerner and others have shown, the spiritual life has historically been a source of empowerment for women, if not economically or politically, at least psychologically and emotionally.
The first chapter is a narrative, in her own words, of Elizabeth Kelly's life and covers such topics as family life, school, young womanhood, marriage, motherhood, mid-life and the move to Yellow Springs. The second chapter, which I have called "The Making of a Spiritual Teacher and Healer," is an account, also in her own words, of her spiritual history. Both the first and second chapters recount important turning points and adaptations in Elizabeth Kelly's life. Discussing David G. Mandelbaum's scheme for the analysis of life histories, Langness and Frank explain,

Turnings, in Mandelbaum's scheme, are the major transitions that a person must make during the course of life. A turning is accomplished "when the person takes on a new set of roles, enters into fresh relations with a new set of people, and acquires a new self-conception" (1973:181). A turning can be either a gradual phenomenon or a single event and it may also be either improvised or in some way prescribed. . . . Adaptations "are changes that have a major effect on a person's life and on his basic relations with others" (1973: 181). They are behaviors that contribute to survival (Langness and Frank 72).

Chapter Three is broken into two parts: Part I is an
analysis of these "turnings" and "adaptations" from the perspective of a broadly defined feminism. Part II analyzes them from the perspective of religious conversion. In the remaining two chapters, I move from concerns with life history to a presentation and analysis of what Elizabeth Kelly actually does as a teacher and healer. Chapter Four presents several of her stories and discusses their function in her teaching and communication of world view. Chapter Five presents and analyzes her techniques as a healer, and places her in a tradition of women's healing. In the Conclusion I come back to the feminist concerns that have informed the project as a whole. This project is thus an oral history of a woman who is a teacher and healer, an analysis of her teaching and healing techniques and of her message and an inquiry into the relationship between her spiritual teachings and feminism.

The objectification of someone with whom I have a relationship that was necessitated by this project, especially the process of feminist analysis, has been a source of great conflict and concern for me. Judith Stacey observes that "conflicts of interest between the ethnographer as authentic, related person (i.e., participant), and as exploiting researcher (i.e., observer) are . . . an inescapable feature of ethnographic method" (Stacey 114). At times I have thought I might escape this conflict by simply recording Elizabeth Kelly's story and leaving any
analysis out. Yet I have learned that objectivity does not exist. The interview process itself is affected by the biases of the interviewer, so any recording of her story by another person would also reflect her or his interests and concerns. The presentation of the text, even if it is a direct transcription of the interviews, will also reflect the bias of the interviewer. The analysis brings these interests and concerns out into the open. But the researcher whose interpretation or analysis differs from that of the researched and who privileges that interpretation is wielding a kind of power that is opposed to the feminist goals of women’s oral history. Rather than "liberating" or empowering her subject, she is confining her in a narrative not of her own making.

It has indeed been a challenge to honor Elizabeth Kelly’s world view, which in many ways I share, while I at the same time satisfied the demands of a feminist critique, which I also value. "Feminism," Daphne Patai writes, "must involve a critique of traditional concepts and structures that have marginalized women materially and psychologically, in the world and in their own souls. It must also ultimately aim at social transformation." (Patai 138) But I have been deeply concerned that I might offend her or betray her vision by emphasizing aspects of her story that, from her perspective, are not so important, or by looking at her life and her message in the light of ideas she does not
accept. I was relieved that, after she read the first analytical chapter, she said, "Thank heavens there’s no masculine bashing. Because everyone was just doing their best." As Katherine Borland explains,

The performance of a personal narrative is a fundamental means by which people comprehend their own lives and present a ‘self’ to their audience. Our scholarly representations of these performances, if not sensitively presented, may constitute an attack on our collaborators’ carefully constructed sense of self (Borland 71).

This study has also been complicated by the fact that I am a "believer," and, as folklorist David Hufford notes, "...it is often assumed that believers cannot be competent scholars of belief traditions" (Hufford 60-61). Hufford disagrees with this view, arguing that impartiality with regard to spiritual beliefs, which are always strongly held, is impossible. The way to achieve impartiality, he writes, is through methodology, that is, through distinguishing between one’s scholarly and one’s personal voice (Hufford 61-62): "The academic world and any religious tradition constitute different universes of discourse, and I must recognize and competently negotiate those differences or I will be discredited" (Hufford 65).
This is a rule I have clearly broken at times throughout this study. While I do assume "the scholarly voice" in the analysis of Elizabeth Kelly’s life history, her healing techniques and her message, I also use my "personal voice," without always, as Hufford advises, indicating the shift, particularly in discussions of belief. Because of the elite status our society gives to experts, whose stance towards the spiritual is one of "fixed disbelief" (Hufford 70), to assume a scholarly voice is at times to take a position of superiority that is inconsistent, not only with my sense of the truth, but with my feminism. My use of the personal voice is one way I have managed my conflict about objectifying someone with whom I have a personal relationship. It makes my study a highly subjective one, a fact which will limit its usefulness for some, but I hope not all, readers. I share Kirin Narayan’s sentiments when she writes, "My interest is in lived experience and ways to better understand it, not in any monolithic theoretical framework" (Narayan 6).

Having to be accountable to scholarly loyalties as well as personal, having what Daphne Patai calls "dual allegiances," has created a conflict that is, I hope, apparent throughout this work as I have tried to balance both perspectives. I have often sought ways to bridge the spiritual and feminist perspectives. In fact, the question of how they might be bridged, an issue I address in the
conclusion, has been a driving force of this project. In response to many of these concerns, Elaine J. Lawless has developed a fieldwork technique called "reciprocal ethnography":

This new approach, which I consider to be inherently feminist and humanistic, takes "reflexive anthropology" one step further by foregrounding dialogue as a process in understanding and knowledge retrieval. The approach is feminist because it insists on a denial of hierarchical constructs that place the scholar at some apex of knowledge and understanding and her "subjects" in some inferior, less knowledgeable position. This approach seeks to privilege no voice over another and relies on dialogue as the key to understanding and illumination (Lawless 1993, 5).

Although I submitted my chapters to Liz for her approval, always telling her that I would change anything that was incorrect or that she did not accept or agree with, she made only minor corrections. She never indicated a problem with the organization of the text or with the analysis, but I suspect her reluctance to criticize stems from her conviction that this is my project. During one interview I said we were co-authors. "No," she said. "You're the author--no, this is just material. Oh no. You're the
author. Well, I think if you're writing anything, a novel or poetry or anything, you have to have some kind of material."

I see Liz's willingness to be "material" for my research as evidence of her desire to help me even if it means I might not be telling her story exactly as she would tell it herself. In this sense, then, I have not produced a true "reciprocal ethnography," especially in the first two chapters, in which my voice has been removed. I can however, with Lawless, say, "My work... is "reflexive in that I readily acknowledge my presence in the research and the possible and very real effects my presence had on the field experience" (Lawless 61).

Despite all of these qualifications, I am confident the project has been helpful to Elizabeth Kelly as well. It is true that in asking her to tell me her life story, I was asking her to become involved in a process of life review which may or may not have been welcome at that time. It was clear, however, as we began the interviews, that she had already done a great deal of life review at this point, not surprising in someone seventy-seven years old, her age at the time, and that she welcomed the opportunity to tell her story. I recall one summer afternoon, for example, when I found Liz sitting on her screened-in back porch where she enjoys spending time in the summer. I was hardly there five or ten minutes before she began to talk, it seemed with a
kind of urgency, about Paramahansa Yogananda and what she had learned from reading his autobiography. I became convinced that day that the project was important to her as well as to me. She said repeatedly, "There is nothing an old person likes better than to have someone listen to what they have to say." As Daphne Patai explains,

Part of what those interviewed "get" from the process is precisely the undivided attention directed at them by another individual. . . . The opportunity to talk about one's life, to reflect on its shapes and patterns, to make sense of it to oneself and to another human being, was an intrinsically valuable experience (Patai 142).

Shortly after we began I heard her telling a friend on the phone, "Roseanne is going to write it all down. It will be all right," which indicated to me that this work was indeed helping to make her voice and her message heard, one of the goals of feminist oral history. Olson and Shopes observe that [our subjects] "enter the interview hoping that our academic role will provide the means for injecting their own world view into the elusive arena of public knowledge" (Olson and Shopes 198).

The angst apparent in so much of the writing of
feminist oral history scholars might lead one to wonder if the problems of this kind of research do not outweigh its value. Indeed, as the editors of *Women's Words* write, "The tendency to engage in academic debate can inhibit the recuperative work of oral history, work that is still necessary if women are to be both visible and audible" (Gluck and Patai 221). Daphne Patai asserts, "Ultimately, we have to make up our minds whether our research is worth doing or not, and then determine how to go about it in ways that let it best serve our stated goals" (Patai 150). In discussing, on one occasion, the possible benefits of this project to her, Liz said, "It has clarified me for myself," and on another, that it had been "encouraging" because she had begun to feel she "wasn't all that successful." Our work together has apparently altered this self-assessment. These alone would be, to my mind, worthy goals. But further, I hope my work with Elizabeth Kelly has helped to broaden our understanding of women's spiritual lives and of the contributions that Elizabeth Kelly, and women like her, have made and continue to make, to our culture.
Notes

1. "New Age," as James R. Lewis points out in "Approaches to the Study of the New Age Movement," is a "label [that] has acquired negative connotations in the mind of the general public" (1). However, as this article and others in Perspectives on the New Age point out, the New Age movement has complex historical roots and has had a widespread influence on contemporary culture. As such, it is worthy of serious study. Lewis quotes Gordon Melton’s definition:

The New Age Movement can be defined by its primal experience of transformation. New Agers have either experienced or are diligently seeking a profound personal transformation from an old, unacceptable life to a new, exciting future. . . . Having experienced a personal transformation, New Agers project the possibility of the transformation not of just a number of additional individuals, but of the culture and of humanity itself (Lewis 7).

Lewis continues:

Melton further observes that, for the New Age, the experience of transformation is identical to what is usually termed a 'religious experience,' and that one prominent model for this transformation is healing. Somewhat more generally, it can be said that in this subculture transformation and healing are more or less equivalent to what is usually referred to as spiritual growth (Lewis 7-8).

Another definition of this very amorphous term is provided, in the same volume, in an article by Shoshanah Feher: "The New Age is a movement that emphasizes that a spiritual transformation will occur after which people will be better aware that they are one with the natural world. This transformation can be achieved through various healing therapies as well as spiritual beliefs and practices" (Feher 330, f.n.1.).

2. Throughout this work I often refer to Elizabeth Kelly as "Liz." This is meant as no sign of disrespect, but rather as a reflection of our actual relationship, which has been on a first-name basis for years. Elizabeth Kelly is called "Liz" by many of her clients, whom she refers to as "friends."

3. As Andrea Grace Diem and James R. Lewis explain, "South Asian religion entered the United States in at least three distinct waves. . . . The second wave was set in motion by a handful of Hindu religious teachers who visited the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. . . .[One of these
important teachers] was Swami Paramahansa Yogananda. In addition
to the ongoing influence of his organization, the Self-
Realization Fellowship, his Autobiography of a Yogi has inspired
thousands of Westerners to undertake Eastern spiritual
disciplines" (Diem and Lewis 48-49). This work has been a very
important influence on Elizabeth Kelly's life and thought.

4. The forum was held on October 23, 1987. The topic was: "Gender
and Science: Can Feminine/Feminist Ways of Knowing Help Save Us?"
Elizabeth Kelly, described as a "spiritual advisor for over
twenty years," was joined by a family counselor as well as by
professors of physical anthropology, chemistry, math and
statistics, and psychology.

5. In his Foreword to The I Ching or Book of Changes, C.G. Jung
discusses "a certain curious principle that I have termed
synchronicity, a concept that formulates a point of view
diametrically opposed to that of causality." He writes that
"synchronicity takes the coincidence of events in space and time
as meaning something more than mere chance, namely, a peculiar
interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as
with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer or
observers" (Jung xxiv).

6. See Trauma: Explorations in Memory, edited by Cathy Caruth, for
important essays on this issue. Especially relevant here is Henry
Krystal's essay, "Trauma and Aging: A Thirty-Year Follow-Up."
A NOTE TO THE READER

The following two chapters are narratives based upon my interviews with Elizabeth Kelly. Though in each chapter I have edited the interviews to create a "coherent" narrative, it must be remembered that an "orally delivered account rendered into print" (Lawless 1993, 63) will differ from a written one and may make different demands upon a reader. Still, I have analyzed the narratives very much as I would literary texts, paying close attention to theme, symbol and imagery. I hope that the reader is able to do the same.

Another point that must be acknowledged here is that, for ethical reasons, certain important material could not be included. The reader might notice gaps in the narrative, or find that areas of Elizabeth Kelly’s life that one might have expected would be covered in a life story are not discussed. The reason for these gaps, most of the time, is that some material had to remain confidential.

The events of Elizabeth Kelly’s life that are discussed in these two chapters are listed in a chronology at the end of Chapter 2. The reader might refer to this record for clarification of locations, dates, and relationships.
CHAPTER 1
FROM THIS DISTANCE IN TIME:
A REMINISCENCE BY ELIZABETH KELLY

Well, why don't we just plunge in anywhere. Yes, I remember, I remember, I was born in St. Louis and my parents separated when I was a year old and then they were divorced when I was three years old and I only remember living with my godparents; but I think we went to live with them when I was two. So I don't remember before that.

But what I clearly recall at this moment--my godparents had a large screened porch that went all the way across the back of the house and it was off the kitchen. And St. Louis is very, very hot, and so it was marvelous to sit out there and there always seemed to be a breeze. And there was an ice cream factory at the end of the street and across the street. And I was never, ever allowed to go anywhere, and for some wonderful reason,--I must have been probably about four or five--but I was given a dollar and I was told I could go and get the ice cream. And it was such an adventure. I had never been anyplace all by myself and with money and something to do and I was so enthralled with the
whole idea.

And when I got there, there was a man and a woman and--it's amazing--I was five and I knew that they were not married. And they both kneeled down, sort of, very fawning, you know, and patting my hair, and I was not an especially attractive child and so naturally I didn't have this kind of treatment and so even as a small child I realized that that was unusual and that there was something in their relationship that was unusual. And then they asked me how much ice cream I wanted and I told them, and then I thought that that wouldn't be enough and that they would think more of me if I--So I just gave them the dollar and said it was for ice cream, and so I was loaded.

In those days, you know, a dollar would have been like about fifteen dollars. So I went struggling home with this and my godparents' godson had given me--it was money he had earned, and as I was leaving he said, "Be sure to bring the change." And here I was, struggling with all of this, and I did feel that somehow or other I had given allegiance to those people who really were not as deserving, and I was thinking all this, struggling along with the ice cream, and when I came in the garden--my godfather was a wonderful gardener and it was very beautiful--and I came in the garden gate and started down the walk and they could of course all see me, and the godson stood up and said, "My God, my dollar!" And somehow or other, "My God, my dollar!" has
stayed with me through all eternity.

But we had this huge screened-in porch and I was out there and I had water and I could knock on the door if I had to go to the bathroom, but most of the time I was alone and I would sing. I always thought I would--I forgot that--I would grow up to be an opera singer. Yes, I wanted to be an opera singer, and finally they drilled it into me that I could not carry a tune and so I couldn’t possibly be an opera singer. And after that there seemed hardly any reason to live. Then I was about three I think.

I was sick a great deal too. Well, I was trying to die with no success at all. When I was two I think, old enough to walk, but not old enough to talk, and I was sitting on the floor in my godmother's bedroom, I realized that I had been born again and I had a body, and I thought, but where am I? And I went to the window and looked up and when I saw the sky was empty, my heart broke because I knew I was on the earth and this is really not a very good place. And I cried and cried and cried and my brother came in the room and I cried and cried and cried for him, and my godmother came in and she thought my brother had done something to me. I remember before I was born. I remember seeing the earth, how beautiful it was. And I knew my mother and father and I thought it would be all right.

I have an older brother and a younger half-sister. My mother [re]married. My half-sister lived with her relatives
more than [with us]. I was eight when she was born and then my stepfather went to work in Cleveland and my mother stayed in Washington D.C. My younger sister lived there with him and his family, and so actually I wasn’t with her very much and when I was with her I didn’t have the same sense of being related to her that I had with my brother. So she was never very significant in my life. In some ways I found her very irritating.

Through all my chaotic childhood I had this doll and it meant a great deal to me. It was a before the first World War doll. It was a very valuable doll. I called that doll "Huntsie," and it really meant a lot to me. I wasn’t two. The doll was bigger than I was. And then I gradually got bigger. And we travelled and my poor mother; I would not step out of the house without the doll. And so my mother would have these two children plus the doll, which was as big as the children, and we’d Pullman, and the doll had to go in the hammock. But I was very careful about what happened to the doll. And I remember she tried to give the doll to the porter and I screamed and yelled and carried on. I couldn’t carry it myself, but my mother had to carry the doll.

She was a secretary. First she was a social worker. She worked at Barnes. I was born at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis and then she went from that; she received more money as a secretary. She was secretary to a president of a bank. And
she liked that; I think it was very gratifying.

I always felt like my mother was something that you had to put up with and do things for. It wasn’t until my mother and my brother had both been dead for several years that I finally realized that they had had an incestuous relationship. See God, or time and space are very merciful, and you don’t recognize truth until you can bear it. That is why I know that when they talk about abused children that the parent who isn’t doing the abusing doesn’t really know. This one girl said that she and her mother and father would sit and watch television and the father would be fondling her and she would look at her mother like, "Can’t you make him stop it?" and her mother would act like she couldn’t see it, you know, didn’t know. And I realized it was because it was so beyond the mother’s ability to cope with that she couldn’t even recognize it. Apparently my stepfather must have realized it because he was very cruel to my brother.

We went from Cleveland to Philadelphia and then we spent a whole summer at Wildwood, New Jersey that I remember as being a very happy time of my childhood. My mother would give me a nickel. We’d have breakfast and she’d give me a nickel and we’d go down on the boardwalk or down on the beach. You couldn’t go on the boardwalk unless you were dressed up; if you had your bathing suit on you had to go on the beach. And usually I would go on the beach and then have lunch and then I’d put a dress on; then I could go down
the boardwalk. That's why I got the nickel. I was so careful of the nickel. And I would walk all the way to the end because there was a little Chinese place there and for that nickel you would get a dish or something, and I would take that home. Well, when my stepfather came, here was all this stuff and he said, "You're just being wildly extravagant giving that child a nickel." So I didn't even get the nickel anymore.

Well then, we rented the upstairs of a house, and the woman's father who had the house, her father, was a sea captain, and every morning she would stand out there with a spy glass and she could see all those boats way out. And she taught my mother to make clam chowder, which I loved, loved, loved. And then after the summer season she had cottages down underneath that and so we moved down there. I didn't realize it, but we didn't have enough to eat, because my mother really didn't like to cook. My mother was really not into taking care of children, especially small children. My mother cooked because the woman was there and expected her to but we weren't there but maybe a couple of months. We moved to Washington, D.C. But my one neighbor complained because we were so thin. But my mother was furious and said it was just a busy-body neighbor and we were fed. But I remember that we had a little questionnaire at school and --I didn't think anything of it--I just filled it out; caused a big commotion. But I was able to have milk and it
was so wonderful. My mother told them I didn’t like milk, but it really did help.

See, my poor mother was stark-raving. I’m sure she was. I think she was physically abused by her father. I think she had an incestuous relationship with her father. Her mother died when she was two and she lived with her father and her father had apparently a succession of women who had lived with him and they would get in these big fights apparently, because my mother would get hysterical and scream and yell. She had severe p.m.s. and made life a real nightmare because she would go into blind rages. Everybody just said she had a horrible disposition and she would admit it herself, you know, in her sober periods--emotionally sober. And as I grew older I came to realize it was a pattern. It had nothing to do with what was happening. It was just repeating a pattern. I sincerely felt that I did all I could for both of them [her mother and mother-in-law], but they were very difficult women. George Bernard Shaw said, you know, that the older you get the more you become what you are.

My mother had a tremendous influence on my life that I didn’t realize. I really didn’t pay too much attention to what was actually happening. I lived in my mind. And I did things that had to be done, but I didn’t realize that you could actually do things and change life, you know. And so my whole effort has been to help people realize that they’re
not helpless.

My mother did not--I think we just have to face the fact that my mother did not like me. And you know, you just have to come to grips with that so you can get on with life. We never got along, never got along, no matter how much I did. It was never, it was never--and my teachers would tell her that I wrote very well, but that--nothing. I realize now it was projection. She was very fond of my half-sister, who was younger. Well I think it was because she didn't raise her. You see, when she was very small she went to live with her father and his sisters, and so consequently it was much easier. My mother was very attached to her and very spoiling. She really liked me the least of the three children. Well, I think she realized that I had this bond to my godmother, and my godmother would send me clothes that were very beautiful, or my father, and my mother would give them away; I never got to wear them.

Actually, when I look back I realize that my brother and I were servants. We were supposed to do everything, which, if you don't know anything else, doesn't seem like a problem. But anyway--oh dear, I don't like to get lost in all that misery. And the terrible part--I was really very fond of my mother and I never came to all these bitter truths, thank heaven, until after she had, not only died, but had been dead for some time. You know, things are too difficult to bear, but then when you get calcified or
something they can become very clear and in a very painless way. And you say, oh yes, that’s true; never liked me. Actually, actually was very manipulating; my brother was very manipulating too, but I never realized that either.

My mother was a rather dowdy looking person. When I would go to St. Louis and visit my godparents,--when I first lived with my godparents when I was very small they had a two-family house and they owned the house. They lived upstairs and the Gumersole girls lived downstairs with their mother. Everybody called her "Nana." And they were very attractive and looked years younger than my mother. I could never believe they were the same age. It’s no wonder my mother hated me because I said to her, I remember, "Why can’t you look like the Gumersole girls? They’re so young-looking and you look so old." You can’t actually hit the person over the head, but you can make life pretty miserable, and so she did. And from this distance in time I don’t blame her at all because--well, she said one time, I remember, that she would rather have raised twenty other children than me.

I remember when we moved to Washington and they bought that house, I had nightmares about my mother and stepfather torturing my brother and I and, oh, that went on for a long time. I was afraid to go to sleep and I would sit at the top of the stairs and then finally they’d see me and--big commotion--and then they would hit me and so it became a
choice between nightmares or the actually getting hit. I was beaten, but not like my brother. My brother was really, really beaten by my stepfather and then when he moved to Cleveland, then [by] my mother--I remember she used that rubber hose from the enema bag, and beating him and he would run away and that would make her mad. We had a big staircase. He'd run up the stairs and I would run along screaming, "Stop it, stop it," and then my mother would turn to me and tell me to shut up, the neighbors would hear.

Oh--it was very, very difficult. But my brother was, you know, he was more of a match for her. I don't know how, but he managed to get along with her. I stayed out of her way. But I would always say to him, "Is she mad? Is she mad?"

She was terribly unhappy. And years afterward, when the truth sort of dawned on me, I realized she had always been terribly unhappy, poor soul. She couldn't help it, you know. I realize now that my mother must have been manic-depressive because she'd be up and down. I think now that she would have had lithium. You know, she did her very best; she just was not a normal person. Anyhow, she came to stay with us, and I remember she came downstairs--she was on the second floor--and she said, "I keep reading the cards," and she said, "all they say is fire, fire, fire." And then she died about a week after that and she had insisted upon being cremated.

My father was a lawyer. He would do lobbying. He quit
school when he was fourteen because his family didn’t have any money. There was—I think they called it the Panic—and he went to work in Marshall Fields as an errand boy. And my mother always spoke of it as revealing his decadent character that after he was there a month he had all the errand boys out on strike. I don’t think they had any money, you know. They were paid so little. But anyway, they did get paid more. And then he received his law degree when he was thirty-six. But then he went to the Colorado School of Mines and got a degree in mechanical, mining engineering and he was a consultant for the Shell Oil Company about legal aspects.

My father would come to Washington periodically when he was lobbying and have these beautiful dinners. He was staying at the Mayflower. And I remember one time; it was February. February in Washington is very cold and dismal, dismal. And we had this beautiful dinner and we had strawberries. Strawberries always reminded me of that fairy tale. They had these strawberries in the middle of winter for some reason or other; and so it seemed to me very remarkable. And then I remember one time the dessert was a melon in a carved chalice like, and there was a light in the chalice and then it had spun sugar. And oh it was so beautiful and it was so delicious. Yes, and then I used to eat at the Mayflower quite a bit. And I went to school.

He was sort of a glamorous figure. I have this bridge
case for cards that he gave me when I went to school; it was brand new. And apparently, you know, one of his admirers had given it to him with his name on it and now it's so worn. It's a great comfort to me. My father had given me beautiful jewelry and he'd given me a cigarette case with my monogram on it in diamonds and I had given this to my mother and my stepfather because they were so poor. I thought it would make our daily life better, but they were both very careful with money. What happened was that they used that money and bought stock, so that by the time he died there was a lot of money. But it all went to my sister and I couldn't have cared less because it means that in future lives I have done everything. If you have done all that you possibly can with your own service, with your own resources, if you have really done it all, you are home free. And I figured it was cheap at the cost.

I never felt that I have severed any relationship with my father. In fact, the thought of my father was always very nourishing and sustaining. I just thought he was smart enough to get out. I thought he was really the most intelligent one in the bunch, and had done exactly the right thing and if I had been him I would have done it too. I did, I think, feel that she was almost impossible to live with and he had recognized it and had the good sense to get out; but we should not have been left there. I always felt I would have had a much better life if I had grown up in an
orphanage. He must have felt that there really wasn’t much he could do. I think he was very realistic and he must have recognized that my brother and I were both so neurotic that it wouldn’t have mattered, truly, where we were. When people are neurotic you just move the neurosis from one place to another, but it doesn’t help them. What helps people is to come out of that through their own effort. And so usually the most merciful thing you can do is nothing and just let them--because if they struggle they will get out of it.

I don’t know when he died. And I have no idea where he was buried, or anything. I’ve always felt like an orphan. I was always very concerned for my brother because in all of my childhood loneliness I always thought we were the same. [Her mother had remarried in 1919.]

My stepfather was not important in my life. Actually, he was such a blank in my life, you know, really almost no contact and almost no realization--like he’d never existed. It was just like something hovering around that could physically get in the way, but no connection. I remember when my mother died he did call and was very kind and I thought it was his brother. I had no idea that I was talking to him. And years later that struck me as being very interesting that even then there was no connection. I thought it was somebody else.

I have an odd attitude about men. Sex doesn’t matter
too much, because you see I didn’t have a father and my
godfather was pretty far out. He had a terrible temper.
Well, he used to pull the phone out, he had such a temper.
And finally the telephone company fooled him. They put it
on a spring, and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t
pull the phone out. From this point in time I realize that
I must have lived with some pretty far-out characters, but
at the time--a child doesn’t know, you know. You just take
all that for granted. I think it was like somebody who was
insane who was turned loose with lions and tigers and chasms
and there wasn’t anything to do but sober up and get out of
it.

My godparents were friends of my mother. They were
German and they were musicians and my godfather was one of
quite a few children. They were an odd family. And the
women didn’t marry. I think my godfather was the only one
who married. And his parents quarreled all the time, but
when he was around ten they had the final blow-up quarrel.
And after that they never spoke to one another. Never
spoke--and slept in the same bed! But they had all these
children. Some of the children lived at home and so they
would talk--tell your mother this or tell your father that.
But they--every night his father--there was a street light
outside and every night his father would put his jewelry,
the watch and all, so that if anybody broke in they could
see it and take it and he wouldn’t have a lot of
disturbance. That was so funny! So they stayed in my mind as some kind of caricature of relationship. These things make myths in people’s minds, and they absorb that and live it out in some way. And so I always assumed that even if people didn’t speak to one another they could still live together. So it never occurred to me that life could be so unbearable. They were very unusual people, I realize from this distance in time. Of course as a child I thought that’s the way people were.

Tante Lisa, my godfather’s sister, had been the only one of my godfather’s relatives who had been really kind to me. I think she was the youngest. Tante Lisa always talked to me; the others didn’t like me. But Tante Lisa did. She was a sweet person, touching, you know, and naturally lost her mind in that austere [environment]. She was very sensitive and loving and even as a small child I realized that she didn’t fit into that atmosphere. And that’s when I recognized you had to fit in; you can’t be too self-indulgent.

They had this incredible kitchen. It had a large square table in the center with the pots hung above the table, and then around the bottom of the table there were slots where the lids were. I’ve only seen kitchens like that in--it’s very European. Oh, they were marvelous cooks. I first went there when I was very small and they let me play with the lids. And then when I went back about a year later I was
too big; I couldn’t play with the lids anymore. They put me out of the kitchen. They were very severe.

I think at that time society was divided into people who overprotected children or who exalted them, and people who didn’t pay any attention to them. So they were either overexposed or neglected. And I think from good fortune it was better to be neglected because then you at least had your own self.

My godfather’s father was very wealthy. He was some kind of businessman in St. Louis. And every summer [my godfather’s] parents and all the children except him went back to Germany to Bayreuth to the great Wagner festival. The whole tribe went except my godfather, who was terrified of water, so he never went.

My godparents always went to the theatre and to concerts. And they went because that’s the way, that’s what life was all about, you know. And they always went regularly. The high point of the year, the opera, the Metropolitan, would come for a month and they had box seats. And they would dress, you know, my godfather in white tie and tails. They always talked about box seats, and I truly believed they sat on orange crates. And it hurt my heart to see them so beautifully dressed and I’d think, they’re going to go and sit on those boxes, isn’t that terrible! In the summertime they went to the outdoor opera. They still have that, the Municipal Opera, the Muny, and the trees grow up
through--the stage is built around the trees. I remember we
saw The Student Prince and Rose Marie, and I don’t know what
all, but it was fun.

The mother and father were agnostics and they had a
gardener and the gardener’s son went to Sunday school and he
was always saying, "It’s more fun than a Sunday school
picnic." So my godfather got the idea that the most
wonderful thing in the world would be a Sunday school
picnic. And finally he got to go to one and he was so
disappointed. He found out people just had ice cream and
cake and horsed around like they usually do. It was very
disillusioning to him. And he and my godmother--I think
they were agnostics. They looked in the Sunday paper and
went where they thought the music was the best. They were
both musicians. But for spiritual nourishment they--Rabbi
Harrison had a service on Sunday morning for Gentiles in St.
Louis. And it was very well-attended. And he just gave
religious instruction, you know. My godparents went there
on Sundays unless there was some very good music somewhere
else.

My godparents really felt that the culture of the world
was in Germany and that they were sort of camping out in St.
Louis with the barbarians, but people had to respect
everyone no matter where they were, and be kind. And my
godfather thought if it wasn’t German, it couldn’t be good
and if the doctors didn’t have a degree from a German
University, they didn’t know very much, and--well, at that time, Germany was exalted. You know, the Kaiser just fell in with the popular belief. They were invincible. They’re pretty remarkable people.

I remember it was during the first World War, my godmother crying and crying because of the things said about Germans in the paper. And she said, "That isn’t true, it isn’t true." And of course they sent all they could to their relatives in Germany after the war. I remember my godmother’s niece was going to Germany and my godmother said, "You should go and visit our relatives," and the niece didn’t want to go. And my godmother said, "I think you should go for at least half a day." So with great reluctance she arranged to go. Well, she got to this little village and she was met by a chauffeured car. They took her to this villa. The maid came and asked her what temperature she wanted her bath. They served her this marvelous food. And she could’ve stayed, gone all over and stayed, but she was the one who decided. And so when she came back, you know, she was very upset with my godmother and said, "Why didn’t you tell me?" Because she remembered that during the war these people were living on what they could find in the fields, you know, and so she thought they’d be in some kind of hovel. And it was a great lesson to find that people who lived like that, during wartime would have to live on what was in the fields.
My godmother always kept in touch and she would always send me whatever was the most fashionable thing at the moment. My godmother sent me clothes, but I remember they were always put away, and I never really looked very nice. And there were a lot of nice clothes and then my mother gave those to people. It was very difficult. My mother didn’t like me because she realized that I had loved my godmother so much. And then finally my godparents did come, and I remember that I opened the door and there they were and my heart just broke, and I cried and cried and my mother said, "If you’re going to cry like that they won’t come anymore," and I couldn’t help it. I had not realized how terribly much I missed them till they were there, you know, and it was heartbreaking for me.

My godmother seemed to me to be able to live. The house was always pleasant, and everything was clean and it was well-managed and, you know, it was like elves did it. You never saw her doing anything. It was because she managed so well. Her name was Anne because I remembered I always called her "Mom." Mom and Dad. And his name was Louis. And I always called him "Lulie Dad." And they were a significant influence in my life. Life was very orderly.

I went to the Powell School in Washington D.C. I was seven in St. Louis and then we went to Cleveland, and I went to school in Cleveland for a year; very disastrous. I know the teacher thought I was retarded. We lived so far from
the school and, I don’t know why, my mother would fix my
brother’s lunch but not mine, and I would have to go all the
way back, and eat and come back and I would be so tired in
the afternoon that I couldn’t really stay awake. We had
these beautiful pear trees on each side and they bloomed.
And I took some to the teacher and then she said people
shouldn’t bring fruit branches and so I put them in the
hall. We didn’t have lockers; we had a cloak room and so I
put them out there. And then she thought I had stolen them.

My school life was very unhappy. It was so unhappy that
I just tried not to be there, and of course that made it
worse because then I, you know, was never really with it.
But it was primarily because I was so tired. When we were
leaving my brother went to the school to pick up the
bookbags-- everything was in the bookbags--and the teacher
said--there was one that was terribly, terribly messy, and
then there was one that was very neat--and the teacher
pointed to the messy one and she said, "That’s hers," and my
brother said, "No, no, this is my sister’s," and the neat
one was mine. And the teacher was so amazed. It was very
difficult. In those early years school was so difficult
that I didn’t move along.

In my high school years my father sent me to the Gunston
Hall. And it was so wonderful. It really helped me to live
because my mother was terribly erratic. But it was a year
with really sane people, regular hours and wonderful food.
It was marvelous. And we went to concerts and symphonies and it was wonderful.

I went away to school and my mother moved to Cleveland to rejoin my stepfather who had been living there for several years with his daughter, my half-sister. I joined them a year after that and then I had ten of the most dreadful years of my life—in Cleveland. Ever since then, no matter what difficulty or unhappiness, I can always say, "Thank God I don’t live in Cleveland." And that’s always been very comforting. So it’s very good to have a terrible experience, because you can always say, "Well, I’m not going through that," you know?

[She did not graduate from high school.]

Really I would have had six months, just another semester. But it was in the Depression and I had to have car fare, and I didn’t have any clothes; I didn’t have any shoes and, you know, it was just too much.

My father would have sent me [to college], but I was not a good student. I think that my father—I don’t think my mother, but I think my father recognized that education was fine. But I was not a good student. I was very good at English. When I was very young they were very impressed with my writing. I remember the English class; it was really very, very boring but I tried to help the other students. I remember my English teacher. We had to write letters to her and she said it was the finest collection of
letters she'd ever read. And that pleased me. The French teacher thought I was a moron. I gave her every reason to believe it.

And the math was very difficult but the teacher was patient and then I discovered that I really enjoyed that and would have paid more attention. I felt there was something mentally liberating in studying math. And I really enjoyed it. I was not good, but it was a great satisfaction to me and the teacher was excellent. He made it interesting. And up until then I had thought it was just some kind of droney thing that you had to go through. It was so good that it made me want to go back and be sure I knew my multiplication tables and things, which before I had just tried to avoid as much as possible.

And I realized then that it's very important to pay attention to everything each day because the future comes out of that and where you ignore the day and don't try to learn as much from it as you possibly can, well, what comes to mind is Swiss cheese, you know; big holes. And I had always thought that that was very dull and I really was very much into making life exciting. Fortunately I began to outgrow it when I began to recognize the truth, you know, that life had meaning and purpose and if you didn't pay attention to it, it really wasn't going to work well at all. I gradually came to more understanding.

She cannot remember having any particular dreams and
goals when she was young."

No, tragically, all I could think of was what I didn’t want. I didn’t want to be like my mother; I didn’t want to be like any of my stepfather’s relatives; and I was very, really backward. Actually, I should have become a writer. All my teachers realized that I did have [talent]. I didn’t want to write because it felt like such exposure. I felt that writing just laid you bare and I didn’t feel up to that. So later, when I did get into writing poetry or whatever, being able to express a feeling was so important and so gratifying that I didn’t care how anybody felt about it. And that’s the way I feel now, you know. And it’s so comforting to me to have somebody actually sit around and listen to what I [have to say].

I always had a talent for writing but I never did. I just never got around to it, you know. And even now I keep thinking I’ll take some time and just do some poetry because I really, really like poetry. The thing is you have to immerse yourself in order to do something, and I lecture twice a month on dreams and the Tarot and what happens is, I really get into the Tarot, give the lecture, then I have to put that aside and get really into the dreaming, and by the time I give the lecture I’m really into it. Then I have to stop it, and--you know.

[After high school] I stayed home and took care of my mother, which I didn’t realize that was what I was doing.
We were in a store one time and this girl that I had gone to school with--and I was with my mother--and this girl said, "Oh," she said, "Come down and apply for a job. You can get a job here," she said, "and we can all live together," and my mother was right there. And I said, "Oh," and my mother said, "No, no, no you can't do that." And I don't know why I thought, no, I couldn't do it. I had a very helpless feeling, like I just couldn't do it. But it seemed to me that I was able to help them because, well, I did everything and I thought, you know, if I wasn't there, what in the world would they do? But I did get a job with the modiste for two dollars a week. She was a dressmaker. And I liked to sew.

Those years before I was married were very, very unhappy. I think I was nineteen; maybe I was twenty [when she met Bob, her husband.] He was the boyfriend of my sister's girlfriend. We lived on the same street. And the girlfriend took me in his car, and we stopped at a gas station. He was working there and he put gas in the car and that was the first time I met him. He had graduated from Notre Dame I think about two years before that and he wanted to marry her but she wouldn't marry him. She was in college. She was studying to be a teacher. And then it was two years after I met him we were married. We were married in 1934.

We went to Erie, Pennsylvania and were married. We
were married in the cathedral and I remember the priest put all his robes on, but we were the only ones. But it was amazing; I felt as though the whole church were full of yellow chrysanthemums and as though everybody I'd ever known was there. It was amazing; it seemed--with music--it just seemed like some incredible thing. And actually it was just the two of us.

I had a very pretty suit, a wool suit and a very smart hat, brown. And the suit had a big bow. The suit had a skirt but it had a full-length coat and a big--"cat's bow" they called it, big taffeta, brown taffeta bow and I had such nice new shoes; I remember that. I have a foot fetish. And we stayed at a hotel and I remember we had dinner and it was very nice. We went by bus. In those days busses were very nice and the stations were nice. The honeymoon was that weekend. It was during the Depression. People didn't do much. It was very difficult.

I sincerely felt that I had no choice [in getting married] because it was the Depression and I think everybody felt that they were just coping with situations. And I think the most terrible thing about the Depression was that people did not feel that they had any personal power, that everything seemed beyond control.

[Marriage offered little escape from the family.]

There were people who were very dependent and I didn't
recognize; his family and my family were very dependent. I think they must have recognized that there was more to life than the way they lived, but they didn’t know what it was. And when I was pregnant with our first son, my mother said that we would go and live with them and it would be cheaper. So we did and they rented half a house, but it had a finished attic--there was a bedroom and a sitting room and a bathroom; it was very comfortable, and of course the steps were very good for me, you know. And I sold Avon, so I was pretty active. But then I had some kind of--I had had kidney trouble when I was small and I looked like a Buddha, I was so swollen. It was just incredible. And I hemorrhaged severely. I had hepatitis--no, not hepatitis, jaundice. I had jaundice. And of course I didn’t know I had jaundice; I was just green and had absolutely no energy; it was impossible for me to do anything. And--there was no help; I think people just thought I was lazy.

And then I became pregnant with our second son and we moved and he was born when we lived there and then we moved to an apartment in a house that Bob’s aunt had owned and our third son was born there. I don’t know how we lived through it. Then we came to Springfield. Then I took the children and went to stay with my mother for a year in Washington because my younger sister had married and I didn’t realize that my mother just didn’t want to be alone. [Bob] stayed in Springfield. And the children stayed on a farm in
Virginia and it was very good for them, I think. Then we went back to Springfield and then we lived in a two-family house, and then we lived on a farm for a year. Then Bob’s family bought us a house.

I think my mother was very instrumental [in her marrying Bob]. She was very manipulating in a very quiet way. And I never knew what was going on anyways; it was very easy to do. Just like going and staying with her in Washington. It never occurred to me that it was her need, you know. I thought it was me. And I don’t think that she ever thought that she was manipulating. I think she always thought that she was doing what was best. I never felt that I [had much choice], but now I have a great deal of choice. I feel like I have a lot of choice every day.

When I was first married I had a very unusual dream. I was on a rainbow bridge, it was shaped like a rainbow, but colored gold and I was crossing it and it seemed imperative that I get across it because it seemed that not only me but many, many others—it was vital. And it was so slippery, and it was not solid; and it moved and sometimes I would fall down and hang on and then I’d climb back, and part of it I would just crawl over. And then when I had a little confidence I would stand up and walk a little, but then I would fall because of the unevenness. And the thing was constantly moving. But I did get across and it seemed absolutely vital. And when I look back I recognize [that]
what I learned from that dream without realizing it was that everything had to be endured. It was vital to carry it on. You couldn’t give up. You just have to hang on. I knew it was vital; not just for me, but others too. I think if it had just been for me I would have given up. It [life after marriage] was so deprived. I had no idea it would be so mentally depriving, mentally and spiritually, because of the differences. And then of course the economic thing just made it all very bad.

I think in any relationship it is vital to recognize the abilities of the other person, and not to expect them to do things that are not in their range of ability. I learned to accept [the differences between her and her husband.] Accepting is a realization and it’s more far-reaching than coping. He [her husband] had a very, very difficult life and I think that to have emerged as capable as he is is very remarkable. I think it is important to realize that differences don’t separate. The core of a relationship is recognizing what you think is a relationship. I do for him what I would want someone to do for me, that is, I try to see that he has clothes that are appropriate, and to be very supporting, and I don’t pry into his life.

I think it’s imperative to get beyond the idea of good and evil, and try to focus on what will salvage everything. I am definitely into salvage. It means saving what is almost lost. I think this whole house and me and Bob and I
and everything is salvage; pure salvage. Well, I think that we both had devastating childhoods, with the best intentions of the world, you know. This is the whole thing. It's always good intentions, you see.

When we lived in Washington we had a neighbor, a trained nurse, a psychiatric nurse, and she worked at a mental hospital. They had two people come, women, and they both thought they were Mary, the mother of God. So for seven years they were able to keep them separate. But one day, quite by chance, they got together on a park bench. One of them recovered. And this is what I've always felt about Bob and I and our marriage, because I realize from this distance in time and with very legitimate reasons, we were both very mentally ill. And with the help of the children and life itself, one thing and another, we managed.

We were married in February and then he [her first son] was born in July. We were married in 1934, and he was born in July of 1935. And then our second son was born in December of 1936 and then our third son was born in May of 1939. And our youngest son was born March the 5th in 1952. So the other boys were much older.

I was forty [when Paul, the youngest, was born]. It was a great blessing. I was cut so much with my other children. And it took months to recover, before I could sit down. And then I had jaundice after my first pregnancy; I had hemorrhaging. But I recovered. I don't think the delivery
was so difficult; I think the pregnancy was very difficult. The oldest child wasn’t four when we had the three and taking care of the children was very difficult. I think [Bob] always did as much as he could. It was never very much, but it was all he was capable of.

I never planned to have any children. They just all arrived. I should have gone to a doctor and had some [birth control] but I didn’t; we didn’t have any money. When I look back, it’s a miracle that we ever survived, with practically no clothing; we had food and shelter, but nothing, nothing else. If I had had a little more financial security I think everything would have been different. But I was so concerned over money. It’s terribly hard, terribly. It’s depressing because you can’t dream, because it’s so precarious you have to concentrate upon just what’s happening.

[She worked briefly for the White Motor Company, but was forced to quit.]

I couldn’t take care of the children. And I wasn’t making much money anyhow. It was just a strain. But I had this fantasy of people working to help the government because it was wartime. But finally I had sense enough to realize that the most helpful thing was to take care of the children.

My children have always been the great blessing and joy of my life. I was never happy until I had the children.
And I was always really trying to help them and everything I did trying to help made everything worse because I really didn’t know. I think I was terribly, terribly ignorant. And so, I didn’t know how to help them. And our income was so limited. I frankly don’t think I was much of a mother, I really don’t. I can say that I didn’t have much of an example, I had not very much help, but the children raised us. I always thought of my children, I always felt like we were fellow human beings trying to get through the [day]--you know. So I didn’t have a heavy-duty mother attitude.

My children have always been wonderfully supporting and compassionate. I can truthfully say that my sons never said an unkind word to me. I realized later that probably it was because I wasn’t a good mother--you know, you should get people to shape up--and I always felt that they and I were doing all we both could possibly do. Sometimes I thought they might have been a little mistaken, and then I would point out what I thought needed to be corrected, but--we were so poor that there was never any need for discipline. We were always just trying to get through the day. I think we managed--a great deal.

I never thought about [having a daughter]. I didn’t really care. I was so used to boys. I don’t think I would have been a good mother to girls because I had such a poor relationship with my mother and I think that subconsciously
it would have repeated. And I had no relationship to my
father or stepfather, so I really wasn’t as demanding with
the boys as I should have been. But they all turned out
very well.

After they were grown up and married, then I thought,
"What do mothers do? Mothers do holidays. Mothers do Easter
and Christmas," and so I could do that and I had wonderful
dinners, and Christmas and all this. I did that over and
over. I had no idea it was a big nuisance. I didn’t know.
That’s how dumb I was. I thought, isn’t this wonderful, do
all this cooking, you see. And the children were so noble.
They would come and do it. You know they’d much rather be
off doing almost anything else. But they would come. And I
kept this up, for years, really until I was physically
unable to do it. Then it was big sighs of relief; we don’t
have to do that anymore. And the first Thanksgiving it was
nice, it was just the two of us, you know, and we didn’t
have to do anything. I thought it was just wonderful and
the children thought it was wonderful too; they were doing
their own thing and--we all grew up.

You know, I think very often people get an idea of a
family and then they project and quite often make one person
a monster and somebody else a hero and somebody this and
that, and then they have to constantly keep these little
dramas going to maintain those fictions. I think it’s so
much better to just evolve into friendship.
I have finally come to the conclusion that I was mentally ill, in the sense that I didn’t have a good sense of reality, of how to, really of how to live, and how to cope. When you get older you go back over to see where you could have corrected something or if you had done something else what would have been better. It’s hard to say what is normal. But I think if you consider normal just being able to make a grocery list and go to the store and then cook—not just trying to make do. I was very neurotic; very neurotic. I didn’t realize it. Naturally, you know. And then of course my poor mother was stark raving.

But I do believe in karma and I do believe that up until sixty you are into a pattern of behavior that is—you’re into a way of seeing things and that naturally creates problems and it also creates a way of responding to what is happening. And I think that from sixty on your mind does become clear and you’re much more able to have a sense of reality and far greater understanding and naturally that leads to compassion and awareness. And I think it makes people much more affable because they’re not so irritated. They’re not irritated because they recognize the truth is that things are going forward and people are doing their best, and they cannot do any more. The Asiatics believe that from sixty on, you’re home free. Then life is whatever you expect it to be or whatever. It’s really your life. Up until then you deal with past karma.
I was very conscious, even when I was very small, of the fact that I had an attitude toward life and it didn’t strike me as being positive or negative. I realized that it was my way of seeing things and whether that was especially productive or not, I realized that that was something I had and that everybody else had theirs and theirs didn’t fit in too well with mine. But we all had to get along together. And of course my attitude was that no matter how difficult life was it should essentially be fun and not be bogged down with it, you know, but really to just keep going and try to make it as productive as possible.

But I did have a doctor several years before Paul was born, our youngest son, who did have the mercy to tell me I was neurotic and that really helped me a great deal. It helped, and then after Paul was born I realized that I was very ill because I was overly conscious of other people and I had a terrible sense of insecurity. I think it was just fear, but it was there all the time; really high anxiety, so everything made me anxious, you know. And I went to a psychiatrist and I told him I thought I was very ill but he thought I was just normally neurotic but it had been traumatic for me having Paul and having to readjust my life. That’s why I have a lot of faith in that Chinese horoscope because when you get into that difficult year,—it occurs once every twelve years—when you get into that it affects your judgment and it’s very difficult. There’s a great deal
of self confrontation and that was very sobering.

I thought I was neurotic because I had such a different attitude toward housekeeping and children, husband and everything. My attitude was that that wasn’t the end of the world, I mean, that these were all human beings and we were all living together and we ought to try to make things as good as possible for each one of us, but that, you know, life moves on. A long, long time ago, I came to the conclusion that there was just God and I and that was it; and anything else just had to be coped with.

We moved to Springfield in 1939 and life really became much better. But it wasn’t until we came to Springfield. And actually my own life didn’t advance until I came to Yellow Springs.

I started [the theatre] in 1948. A friend of mine took me to Civic Theatre. Springfield had tryouts and I was given small parts and then I tried out at Antioch and I was given small parts, and I loved that, you know. And Paul Triechler, bless his heart, he said I was the most conscientious person he’d ever met. I couldn’t believe it, because my mother was always saying I was never conscientious.

I had the lead in The Madwoman of Chaillot in Springfield and I had a marvelous part in Yellow Springs. I loved the acting; oh, I liked the camaraderie, but the acting was what I really loved. What I really liked was reaching people. I
played in The Crucible in a very small part in the beginning and this friend of Dal’s said--I had a long speech--and this friend of Dal’s said, "It’s so amazing to hear that beautiful voice." I never thought my voice was beautiful. And that really touched my heart, that he would say that. And in the beginning, Dal wanted us all to sit around and then walk up and do the stage part and then go down and sit down, but at the end of the second act I was so sobbing, I couldn’t get out of the chair to go up. And so I ruined it as far as he was concerned; I ruined the show. But then I would come out, and at the end we were going to be hauled off to be hanged and this dear young man—he used to write to me; for years he wrote to me—he would say something, and I would touch him and say, "There is another judgment waits us all," and they would sob in the audience. And this one man, [a] big man, --I could tell he was just heartbroken, and that was so gratifying! It made me so happy.

And every night I would just try to break everybody’s heart,—because life does break your heart. I didn’t think it was me breaking their heart, I thought it was--this is life, this is the way it is, and actually it was participating, you know, in some enormous thing. And then, when I was in Dark of the Moon, I was the conjure woman. Oh, I loved that part. And at the end, you know, "The moon, witch boy, the moon. And when the moon breaks through the clouds, you’ll be a witch again!" Oh, I love that!
I think I stopped [theatre work]; I don't know, I just sort of faded out. Actually I think I became more active in The League of Women Voters, and it took up my time. I was on the board in Springfield and I just did some research, and things like that.

[Though life improved when they moved to Springfield, this period too had its difficulties.]

I felt in an alien culture. Yes, definitely. I don't know whether I was understood or not; maybe I was understood better than I thought, but I felt alien. It was not a happy time. It was my projection, I think; I projected onto Springfield--I wasn't really coping with my life, but I realize now that it was a kind of protection, because if I had been exposed to the realities of my life at that time, I could not have endured it. That's how I know that the universe protects us. We are led to truth and understanding as we are strong enough to endure it.

I really didn't realize anything about my family, really much about my life, until I was strong enough to endure it. Until then, I lived, thank God, in a wonderful little pink shell where I could cope, you know. This is how I know that wherever people are, that is where they are capable of being. It would be a terrible thing to try to get them to somewhere else. It is not a terrible thing to help them to get somewhere else, but to make them go is cruel.

Actually, I had had Valium for eight years and then the
doctor just said, "No, you can’t have anymore," because my life had improved and he was very wise to realize I didn’t need it. But I didn’t know that was very addictive so I was crying in church and really having a very trying time. I didn’t know it was withdrawal. But that took about a year. And it was very hard on Paul because he didn’t know it was withdrawal; he just thought I was stark raving. But he was very sweet and kind; very supporting; wonderful, wonderful. My children have been marvelous.

[They moved to Yellow Springs in 1962]

Francis and Oliver Loud were having their first sabbatical. They were going to Europe and I rented their house. It was all furnished and everything. Actually I was very ill and it was that or a hospitalization. I think we were still living in Francis’s house and I was very ill and I realized I needed some kind of help. But actually it was valium withdrawal and not my life, but I was focussing on the idea that it was my life. My mother died and my mother’s sister died, that I was very fond of, and Bob’s mother died, and these had been very dominating, manipulating--I didn’t realize that, you know; I really had no idea. [It was] the adjustment in my life, you see. And our sons had always been home and the two oldest married and the other had been in a monastery and he left the monastery. But then he and our second son went into the army. But all of that took a lot of readjustment. I really thought I was
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and it was always going to
be like that. I was locked into the idea of mama and papa
and the children and their life.

I didn’t tell [the doctor] that I was recovering from
valium because I didn’t know. I just knew that I was coming
unglued. It is a great blessing because I got better. It
reminded me of the time my brother decided that I ought to
learn how to swim. We spent the summer at Wildwood, New
Jersey and we had been living in Philadelphia. It was after
my mother was married to my stepfather, and my half-sister
was a small baby and my stepfather was off somewhere. And
we were there in Wildwood, and it was wonderful because
there was so much freedom. You could just put on a bathing
suit and go and sit by the beach all day. One day my
brother thought I should learn to swim and so they took me
by the hands and--I can’t remember; I thought they put me in
a boat but I’m not sure. I don’t remember whether I was in
a boat and I got pushed out or whether they took me out and
let go of me. But I was in deep water and I was so mad at
my brother for taking me out there I forgot all about
learning to swim. I just got right up to that beach and
pounded on him. Oh, I was terrible; I nearly scarred him
for life. And then when I finally realized I had been
swimming in the deep water, I forgot all about him and went
back in the water, free as a bird.

[When she told the doctor all that had happened] she
said, "Mrs. Kelly, don't you realize you have gained your freedom?" and that gave me such a [jolt]; It's amazing. I always tell people, if you have a problem [or a] confrontation, [or] see things exactly the opposite of another person, if you get beyond that and just think that you're both human beings, or something bigger, then that is no longer an obstacle.

When I prostrated myself--that was in 1962--before the picture of Swamiji Sri Yukteswar and I said, "I offer you my heart and mind, body and soul--I will be obedient," then life was really transformed. I just realized I had to shape up. I knew that I was mentally, physically and spiritually very ill, and that there was no help. I really needed guidance and support.

I always wanted to live in Yellow Springs, but I realized that I am very limited; I'm not an intellectual. I'm not educated, you know. But I realized that this was an academic community and that I would not fit into that, but I thought it was so compassionate and so many different kinds of people lived here, that I would not feel shut out, that I would be at home. It seemed to me to be mentally stimulating and to have an extraordinary degree of acceptance. All kinds of people live very comfortably together. The born-again Christians and the Communists and the whoever--here they all were, you know. I think it's very spiritual and I think that spiritual awareness is
always exhibited with a compassionate allowance for
different ideas. Because here, well, you know, we have the
born-again Christians, and we have agnostics and we have
atheists. There's just all kinds of people. My mother,
incidentally, called the FBI and said that I was a Communist
because I was very fond of Antioch. I don't know what they
ever did about it; probably tapped the phone. And poor,
dear Antioch. And this is why we always pray for Antioch,
because I believe if you have convictions and if you are
willing to stand up before God and everybody and say, "These
are my convictions," and really implement them into your
life, then you are going to be seen by whatever people don't
like. It gives them an object. And they can say whatever.
And so people who know nothing about Antioch and have never
even been there or had any relationship to it, have a very
queer idea, weird ideas.

Oh, [Yellow Springs is] a refuge, it's definitely a
refuge. If there's a place for birds and beleaguered
animals, this is one for humanity. I have always felt it
was a refuge. And I have felt that without it I would have
perished; definitely; yes; because if you feel completely
misunderstood and misinterpreted and you can go someplace
where you are so at home that people don't even pay
attention to you, I mean, you're just like the wallpaper or
other people or whatever, there's no way to describe how
comforting that can be.
And so we came and after we had been here two or three months, [Bob] said he liked Yellow Springs and would like to buy a house here. He commuted; he worked in Springfield and then one day he said, "If you give me a penny, I’ll retire." You see this is how far-sighted in planning we are, you know; like two little kids in the woods. And the children really are much more grown-up, much more capable. They’re very wonderful, kind to us and do all they can. And so I gave him the penny and he retired and we’ve been happy ever since.

So, actually, ever since I have been working my life has been so much better; since I’ve been doing readings. Up until then I was really fumbling along trying to fit in. And I must say without any startling success. The miraculous thing is that for all the performance I’ve been through, I feel better than I have in years. And the great gratification of my life is that in the end I’ve been able to make money. And that is why the house looks nice and the garden’s cared for. I do readings and then, you know, once a month I go to the dream group and then I have a few classes here and there and then I do therapy. I can’t tell you how gratifying it is to be able to see that a limb needs to be taken away from a tree and have it done, or if the roof needs to be fixed, to get it done. This is the most gratifying part of my life, really marvelous. I can do what I please. Well, I only want to make things better, you
I think you have to do what you can do and give up anything else. Just keep going. Do what you can. And that’s all there is. All I know is to keep trying and hope for the best. Really that’s all I know. And not to be discouraged.
[It was in Yellow Springs, Ohio that Elizabeth Kelly began her career as spiritual teacher, counselor and healer. It is clear from the recounting of her life thus far what events brought her to Yellow Springs. What follows shows the early religious and spiritual influences on her life, which also may have contributed to the direction her life took at this point, as well as the gradual shaping of her new role.]

When I lived with my godparents we went to the Lutheran church, which was sort of cavernous and had stained glass windows and seemed very much like God's house; I could really believe God was living there. And so I remember talking in whispers, and being very quiet. And then at Christmastime, the hymns, everything was sung in German, and at Christmastime they had a huge tree that was lighted with candles and all the men stood around with buckets of sand in case the tree caught on fire. And my godfather was always terrified and I remember him standing there terribly frightened. And I had no idea what he was afraid of. I
just knew he was terrified. And of course they sang "Oh Tannenbaum, Oh Tannenbaum," which has always been my favorite Christmas carol and it seemed to me more in tune with Christmas than all the other things. And it still does. And I don’t like to hear it in English because "Oh Tannenbaum" is so beautiful.

And then my mother married my stepfather and we moved to Cleveland and his sister was a Christian Scientist. And so we went to the Christian Science church which was like--I can’t tell you how different it was, you know, from this dark, awesome, cavernous place into a bright, sunshiny--it looked sort of like a library--and [it was] very disorienting. But it was all right, you know. I figured that’s what happened. But then I heard this woman. She talked about God and prayer in different ways. And I thought she was a little eccentric but I didn’t pay any attention to it.

But then my cat got sick and I had never had a pet and I missed my godparents so terribly. I felt like somebody that had been put down in Mars, you know. But I had that cat, and it really meant a lot to me. Well, the cat got sick and I remembered this woman saying that all you had to do was pray and everything would be all right. And I remember asking her, you know, if people really got well, and she said oh yes, yes, they got well. And I thought, well, you know, that’s something.
And so when the cat got sick I could hardly wait for
Sunday, which is unusual because they usually had to drag me
to the thing. But I was all ready to go and so I asked her,
you know, if prayers would help animals too. "Oh yes," she
said. "Anything could be cured." Then I could hardly wait
to get home. I grabbed that cat and I prayed and prayed and
prayed, and if I didn’t have chores to do or anything else I
was holding onto the cat and praying.

Finally, [I] forced my poor mother, who was pregnant, to
take the cat to the doctor. The neighborhood told me,
unfortunately, that there were doctors for cats and so I
would not let my mother rest until we got that cat to the
doctor, who said that there was nothing he could do; the cat
was going to die. So then I had to get back to the church
and I said, well, things are going to die and--"Oh no," she
said,"That doesn’t matter. You just pray and they’ll get
well." So I grabbed that cat and prayed and prayed and
prayed and then of course the cat got better.

And then my mother was furious and said that the doctor
had lied and put this poor child through all this misery,
but most of all I think she was mad because she’d spent the
money and the cat got better. But anyhow, she called the
man up and said a lot of unkind things on the phone and he
said there was no way that cat could get better. So we had
to put the cat back in the box and go and see him and he
said it wasn’t the same cat. So my mother was furious. I
think she wanted her money back, but anyway, it didn’t even
strike me as odd. The woman had told me that if you prayed
the cat got better, so what else was there, you know? I
just thought they were just haggling. So I became a devout
Christian Scientist because I felt that was very true.

I realized there were enormous energies in life that
people could use. But people were embarrassed to hear or
talk about this. I would tell my brother things I saw and
knew and what I felt and he told me if I kept talking like
that, they would just put me away. It’s different when you
hear it in church and when a person says it, because in
church everybody listens and nobody does anything, but it’s
all right to hear it. But if you’re a person out there
doing it, that’s not good. It’s not good because it implies
a different way of using energy and people don’t want to
hear it. So I would just go ahead and use the energies but
not talk about them. Any person can do it.

[In addition to the Lutheran and Christian Science churches,
Elizabeth Kelly was also powerfully influenced by Self
Realization Fellowship and the teachings of Paramahansa
Yogananda, to which she had been introduced by her mother.]

When my mother was alone this friend of ours, this
neighbor, prevailed on my mother to go [to Self Realization
Fellowship]. And my mother really liked it and went quite often and it seemed to improve her disposition. And then the neighbor said that she thought it would be nice for me and my mother thought I wouldn’t like it, but I did go. I was fourteen or fifteen. I think I was fifteen. I think it was in 1927. My mother took me to several lectures that Paramahansa Yogananda gave, and then, this one evening she took me to one of his classes. And I just loved him from the moment I first saw him. I realized that I was in the presence of a person who had complete understanding, and that we were all understood, and that the way we were was all right. None of us had to be anything else; that it was just all right.

And so she took me to the class and I remember that the people were scattered around in the audience. You know, ordinarily people sit sort of together, but it struck me at the time as odd that they were all over. And then I realized-- from the distance in time-- that he wanted to give everyone a special blessing to kind of unify all of this. It was the old Willard hotel, in Washington D. C. It was very old. Lincoln had been to that hotel, so you know how old it was. And in the twenties--since then it has all been rebuilt and it is in use now, but it’s entirely rebuilt. So it was a pretty rickety place.

It was a proscenium stage and they pushed these stairs up to it and they were not very wide and it must have been
about fourteen feet. It was pretty high, and I was afraid of heights, and my mother didn’t think that I would go up there. So she was ahead of me, but nothing would have kept me from going. When we got to the top of the steps there was a little place to stand, not very big; about the size of your shoes, you know, not much bigger. And so when she went ahead of me then I stood on that little platform and I couldn’t move. And I was so embarrassed because I couldn’t move. And then I realized that it wasn’t my fault. So there wasn’t any need to be embarrassed, but on the other hand I still couldn’t move.

And then I realized that Paramahansa Yogananda was in a trance and he had his arm out, like this, and he had pulled his shirt back, and people would put their hand here and he would make this big muscle go up and down. And then they put their hand here and he would make this one. He could control every muscle in his body. He was constantly making an effort to help people realize what could be accomplished through the practice of yoga. And of course it was physical control so that you overcame that sense of being helpless in a body that you couldn’t do anything with.

So gradually, even in the trance, he realized nobody was going by. Then, he looked at me and the first thing he thought was that I didn’t want to touch him because he was dark. He was about the color of that buffet. And that had never occurred to me. So that hurt my feelings and I felt
like I was going to cry. I just knew he thought that. It isn't difficult to tell what people think--if you are open to people. So anyway, then I started to cry and then he changed his mind; he knew why I was there. I never knew why I was there; but he knew. And he smiled. He had the most wonderful smile. Then he took my hand and held it on his arm here and here, and then he patted me on the head. And then [I] went behind him and down.

But then after that, I think I went two or three times and whenever--he would always look through the audience at different people and he would look and smile, and he smiled at me. At the time it seemed like a warm, loving recognition. But later in my life I realized what a benediction, what a great blessing [it was]. And whenever things seemed very, very, very difficult, I would always remember that.

Then I lost track. I remember reading that he had gone to India and I thought, "Oh, my dear Lord, he's not here." And then I would think of him in my heart. Then a friend of mine had a copy of The Autobiography, but it said Paramahansa Yogananda; see, I had known him as a swami. And she was very amazed that I had known him. And I was very amazed that here there was a book, you know.

He took the country by storm. And thousands and thousands of people attended his lectures. He lectured in Washington and New York and Philadelphia and really along
the East coast and he was very famous in his time. He was received at the White House. He was very prestigious, you know. He was very honorable. And he just said the same thing all the time. Calvin Coolidge or the man driving the car or the busboy or whatever, you know; all the same; all the same. And it was so amazing because at that time there was such a fantasy of inequality. You know, that some people were very superior and other people didn’t matter. And so the incredible part of his teaching, just seeing him move around, was that it was always the same, always the same. He was extraordinarily humble. That was the outstanding characteristic.

And that was the outstanding characteristic of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Oh and His Holiness the Dalai Lama runs a tight ship; his monks quiver. But he himself is the soul of humility. But his eyes are like torches. You want to be very unnoticeable, which only comes from perfect behavior.

I think I told you of my encounter with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I went to a lecture by a man, he’s a nutritionist and traveled all over the world. His home is in Los Angeles so whenever he went on one of these jaunts, he took along one of these marvelous photographers. So he had a magnificent film of his travels.

And at one time he visited His Holiness the Dalai Lama when the Dalai Lama was still in Tibet and he had a very
wonderful picture of him and--he was a rather trying man; I found him a little difficult. He had the effrontery to ask His Holiness the Dalai Lama how he became or if he thought he should be the Dalai Lama. His Holiness did reply and said he had been chosen and that finished that. But when I saw the picture of him and that incredible calmness and gentleness, you know, it was like somebody being tormented by a very nasty fly who didn’t really kill the fly, you know, just endured it. And his behavior was so regal and compassionate; he was very merciful.

It was a rude and vulgar question and His Holiness’ response was an enormous compassion that made you realize that the whole world needed to be treated in a compassionate and loving way and not have its faults pointed out one by one, you know? And when I saw that I thought, “Oh, if I could just be in the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, if I could just see him, everything would be so wonderful.” The Hindus call that satsanga, you know, when you see a holy person.

Well, that was years ago and time went by. It must have been in the early 1970’s. And then my friends were going to--His Holiness the Dalai Lama was coming to Madison, Wisconsin. There are many Buddhists on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and there’s a large Tibetan Buddhist center near Madison and His Holiness was visiting there and then he came back later and gave a
marvelous initiation. It dissolves past karma; it's a very wonderful, great, incredible blessing. He gave one in Switzerland and when he gives them in Tibet thousands of people go but more and more people are going now because they recognize the power.

But anyhow, so I was able to go with them and he gave a lecture. It was supposed to be at the university auditorium, which held a lot of people, but they put it at a high school auditorium and we were there two hours early. In about ten minutes the place was standing room only. The man came out just stunned. He said, "There's fifteen hundred people in the parking lot. We'll have to go to the gymnasium." And so we all got up and moved along. Well, at that time, I wasn't using a walker, but I wasn't able to get along very well by myself--[I was] very dependent upon others, and so we all got up.

Well, it was all that milling around and crowds and pressure, you know, and I lost track of everyone and so here we were going down this hallway--just [an] absolute mob, but it was all right. You were held up by the crowd, so that wasn't a problem. But, it sort of stopped, and there were doors with little glass windows and we stopped and there was a glass window and I looked in and there were rows of Buddhist monks and facing me was a Buddhist monk with the most beautiful smile I've ever seen. And I was so spellbound and I looked and I thought, "Isn't that
beautiful!" but I was more concerned with being alone and wondering where everybody was and so I just looked, you see. I didn’t smile back. Because he was smiling at me, see, but I didn’t smile back.

And he said a few words and a monk came and stood in front of the door so I couldn’t see. Then I realized it was His Holiness the Dalai Lama. My heart died in me. But it was so wonderful, it was so wonderful, and instead of smiling, or bowing or anything, [I] just stared. He was smiling like a true friend, like "I am glad you’re here." And I was, you know, caught up with what’s going to happen to mama; more concerned; not aware. That is why, to be aware, to be aware. We all have twenty-twenty rear hind vision.

So the next day he gave a lecture about Buddhism. The essence was personal responsibility and choosing some particular path and then being willing to follow the discipline of it. It’s always easy to begin; very difficult to stay. And the next day he gave refuge and that was at a place like Bergamot, a Catholic learning center, and it was on a little hill, and there we were two hours early. This was when I could still stand and it didn’t bother me, and we were the first ones there then. So then they put this magnificent carpet down and then His Holiness came and when he stepped on the carpet, the energy that radiated out from that gave a great blessing for miles in all directions. And
he smiled very lovingly to everyone.

Refuge is salvation; it’s comfort, protection. And I was amazed that it’s so much like the Christian Mass, it was incredible, except at the point where, in the Mass, the chalice is raised and the host exhibited, at that point the person officiating throws rice over the congregation; and afterward, everybody’s picking up the rice and I was able to pick up a few pieces. But anyway, then he gave refuge, and then afterward, you get hot tea with honey and you get rice with raisins and honey. And I told Bob he’d better watch it because it’s a lot nicer than bread and wine [laughs]; it’s much more comforting, you know, to have your weary bones rejuvenated with a cup of hot tea.

I do believe that Buddhism is the religion of the future because it’s based on cause and effect and they don’t have any bloody history of trying to make people Buddhists, you know. It comes out of one’s convictions and doesn’t have anything to do with social pressure. And I think that its outlook is very scientific, you know. It’s just your own activity. And the realization that there is more than one life. But I think the Christians recognize that because of the idea of purgatory and heaven and hell. You realize there’s more that goes on.

But that was very enlightening and I felt it was ennobling in ways that--the discipline of traveling very far and spending a small amount of time in worship; I can’t
think it would be like most spiritual gatherings. I mean these were total strangers and many different languages and it seemed more a common purpose of something that the person was actually doing rather than a kind of mingling with others. And it was physically a great discipline. It seemed to me ennobling sacrifice that everyone was doing. It wasn’t that they were having a happy time, but that they were making a great effort to honor His Holiness the Dalai Lama and to have the enriching experience of actually seeing him. And that was when I came to understand the Hindu satsanga, you know, where you just view the person. It had never been as significant to me as it was then. I really realized what that meant because I have always felt it was an incredible blessing.

I always knew that the name Paramahansa Yogananda was an incredible blessing, but at that time I was very young and I wasn’t as intellectually aware. I think in my heart I always stayed in touch. I had oftentimes to other people repeated his teachings and I was very sorry that I had not listened and paid more attention because I could only give certain advice and not get into the depths.

[In the sixties and seventies Elizabeth Kelly began serious study of the Self-Realization teachings and was initiated into Kriya Yoga in 1978.]
I had the lessons, but I had not finished the lessons. I think I had stopped doing the lessons. I was really completely devoted to Paramahansa Yogananda and telling everybody to read *The Autobiography*, but there wasn’t any group at that time; although at a lecture in Columbus a man did come up who was a member and I was so happy to meet him. Then I resumed the lessons and then when [a friend] took me to Canada I was initiated.

[Her mother had a powerful influence on Elizabeth Kelly’s evolving spiritual life. She had introduced her to the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda, which were to become so important in her spiritual guidance of others. In addition, she had always been interested in numerology, astrology, palmistry and the Tarot.]

My mother read cards. My mother did that all the time. She read them like fortune cards. She read and she left the cards and I had the cards for years before I ever even touched them. [When I was young] I thought I wouldn’t want to do that. I used to march around saying when I was old and grey I wasn’t going to sit around reading cards for people. Everybody laughed, you know. They thought I was terribly funny.

I started because my neighbor was very ill and she would come over. Her husband was really, really difficult, and
she was going to a psychiatrist twice a week because she was dreadfully ill. Her husband worked for NCR and they have a marvelous health program that pays the psychiatrist. Unfortunately at that time the money went to the people and then the people paid the psychiatrist. Well, he didn't pay the psychiatrist and the only recourse the psychiatrist had was not to see her. And she was dreadfully ill.

So she would come over here two or three or four times a day and I would sit and talk to her and go over the only things I knew. Actually it was just conversation, you know, anything that could divert her mind or like women talk, you know, just about whatever's going on; nothing highly significant. And I was terribly concerned that I might say something that would disturb her. And I tried to be as helpful as I could.

And long afterward, when her husband finally broke down and paid the psychiatrist and she went back to him,—I remember clearly because this had worried me—she said, "Dr. So and So says the same things you do." I was so comforted. Oh God, I was comforted, because she was dreadfully ill and—actually, it was like trying to save somebody from drowning every day, you know, and you think you pulled them over, and the next day there they are ten feet down. It went on for a long time.

And in all that reminiscing and reinforcing I did mention that I could read cards and my family had all read cards.
So she told another friend of ours, and he came and asked me to read for him. But when he came and I read for him, I could see that his daughter was going to be killed. And I did it three times and it came up exactly the same way. So I made up my mind that if it happened I would read for anyone who came. And I told him because it showed in the cards that while it was a very terrible thing it would have blessings and it did, because it increased his awareness and his wife’s awareness incredibly.

It made me very ill; because I knew, like everything else, it was more. It was for both of us a whole, dramatic change in life, and it would never be the same. And then one Sunday morning my neighbor was here and her daughter came and said that the girl had been killed the night before. And I could hear this sound like a heavy door closing and I knew that life would never be the same. I had no idea what was going to happen; I just knew that [life] had moved along.

This friend of mine brought a friend, a wonderful man--he had come from an incredibly wealthy family; he was a graduate of Princeton, and had been married several times and had really established each wife, given very generous alimony to, and not begrudging; he was a fine man and really happy that he could do it. But when I met him he was in a real financial trough and was working as a night watchman and his sole concern was his fourth--he was married then to

100
his fourth wife. But he was terribly concerned because he didn’t have any money and he wanted her to have as much as the others. And he had a numerology book and I kept telling him it should be published and he said yes, it certainly should be and--he was like me, you know, he never did too much about anything.

So one day he did a lot of numerology for me and he said, "Oh," he said, "you’re going to teach and teach," he said. "You’re a teacher, you’re going to teach and teach." And I said to him, "But darling what in the world could I teach? I don’t know anything." "Oh no," he said, "You’re going to teach and teach." And I did his cards and I said to him, "Oh, you’re going to make an awful lot of money, an awful lot of money." And he said, "How in the world can I make money being a night watchman over in Dayton?" and I said, "I have no idea, but you’re going to make an enormous amount of money." And he just patted me on the head and I patted him on the head and we didn’t believe either one, but we had a great respect for each other, you know, but neither one of us thought the other one knew what they were talking about.

And he knew a great deal about patents because he himself had been a kind of amateur inventor and had gone through that a lot. And I think in a bar or someplace he met this man who had an invention, an older man who didn’t know anything about how to do it. So he guided him and
helped him and the man gave him a portion of the royalties, and so he made a fortune. He didn't live too much longer after that but he was able to leave his fourth wife very well off, which was his primary concern. And I, of course, fell into teaching. And it was very nice for both of us because we were very sincere and loving and trying to help one another. The universe is--bigger.

After we moved here it was a year before I started talking to my neighbor. So it would have been in 1963 that I did the reading. And nothing earthshaking occurred for several years, but I went to the YWCA in Springfield to swim and the girl who was in charge of the programs there, we became friends. And I had friends who went and taught astrology and then I taught palmistry. One of the people in that class came to see me just a few weeks ago. That was twenty years [ago]. But he learned a great deal and it did a great deal for his life. And the other people went on to become very, very good astrologers. And one of them I think has become rather well known. He was a very fine man, very conscientious. He was a teacher, very hard-working. He was so nice. Very interesting people in that group. They used to come every Saturday and they would bring chips and drinks and things and I read for every single one of them night after night. I didn't realize I was doing some kind of apprenticeship, you know.

When I look back at life I see that it has a very
fulfilling pattern. So I try to encourage people to realize that each day does matter and whether it appears to be or not, it’s going forward. And the best thing to do is to do all you can each day because it does have a great deal of meaning and purpose.

[The following experiences show how Elizabeth Kelly gradually came to assume the role of "ritual expert."]

I had a friend, well, still have, of course, she lives in Jamestown. Jamestown is a very odd little place, very intense energy. It’s on 42. It’s just a little village, you know. When the settlers came to America, throughout the forest there would be wide ridges like roadways with no trees and the Indians wouldn’t set foot on them and of course [the settlers] were delighted. They could run carriages through them, you know, wagons, and they called them traces. What happened is the tornadoes go right down the traces. 42 is a trace. And in Jamestown they have a history--they’ve had three tornadoes; they always came right down 42. And they’re on 42.

So, how did I know her? Oh, she came to see me, she heard about me, she came to see me. Her name is Geraldine and she works for the elections--board of elections. And she has a daughter--an only child--and the daughter had a friend, a girl she’d gone to school with and the girl had
married and she had two little children. And they bought this very good house in Jamestown, a very sound, excellent, well-built house, but it had a presence. And it used to clop across, come down the steps and go into the pantry. It was chilling; it was eerie. But it made a lot of noise, and the littlest one’s playpen was at the foot of the stairs. It was an enclosed stairway and the little thing would just grab the thing and shriek and scream in terror. And this girl was a student of mine and she said to the oldest of the children, "Well, don’t be afraid," she said, "Jesus is everywhere and Jesus will take care of you," and this little four year old said, "Even Jesus was scared." Oh it was hysterically funny. (laughter)

So, this was a very good investment but they couldn’t live there. And this was the history of this house. People couldn’t stay in the house. After people lived there, they would just say,—they found out, you see. Because she wondered why she got the house at such a good price, because it was such a bargain, you know. Well, she found out, but she was a hard-headed little girl, and she didn’t want to give up the house just because this thing was clomping around. And, she was pretty remarkable. So she wanted to know if there was anything I could do. Well, she asked Geraldine if something could be done, you know, because she wasn’t about to--most people just packed up and left, but she was not into that.
So anyhow, I said that yes, I thought there was definitely something that could be done. And so I asked people to come, and I didn't realize how many people I knew until the night I had this done and this mob showed up. I mean a mob! (laughter) And we went over there like some funeral cortege, all these cars stretched out and of course I thought it was so hysterically funny. Nobody else thought it was funny. And Bob went. You know, he never participates in anything, and I said to him I was very grateful, and I was happy he was going, but I did wonder why, you know, because he never, never goes anywhere. And he said, "I just want to know what you're going to do."

So we got there, and I had these beeswax candles, and a picture of Paramahansa Yogananda--no, Swamiji Yuketswar, because he was an avatar of wisdom, and I felt that this was something that if it could be understood and assimilated would disappear. Because it's always the fantasy of being separate that is the problem. And in human beings, that divine energy, when it returns to the source, the physical body is dead, but the impressions of the person can be so strong that that needs to be dissipated. It's like getting rid of an idea.

So, we put on the stairway the seven, four in the back, three in the front, beeswax candles. Beeswax candles are unusual because bees don't come from the earth. So anyhow, and I put the picture there, and then I had them join hands.
Then I realized I had a real group of nonbelievers. When we took hands I could tell that, I mean the energy was obviously "Now what?" It was curiosity. But that didn't matter. You know, you always have this fantasy and then you face the reality. But, it didn't matter. The evidence that they were there, see, is what mattered. The energy, the energy. The reason I had asked them to come was not because they were going to believe anything, but to participate and for the energy. Because I knew we needed an enormous amount of energy to counteract, to really overwhelm that energy that was there with something greater; more understanding. My own feeling was to be helpful, you know, but recognizing the unity of all of that, so that we could assimilate it and move it on, you see, overcome that fantasy of being separate.

So we joined hands and I thought, "What in the world can we do that we all at least know?" And then I thought, "Well, we know the Lord's Prayer." So we said that out loud and it was the most incredible thing. There was this enormous field of energy, going down. It just felt like you were rooted. And then it all came back up and it was almost visible. Just an exquisite feeling of total relief. And the whole--it was like a fragrance that just went everywhere and from then on everybody who goes into that house has that feeling.

What happened--and I realized in a moment what
happened—it was an elderly farmer. He had retired, very wealthy, and built the house—his wife and son and he. That was his reality, his wife and son and the house. Well the son died, and the wife died and he was left, and then he died so the only thing left was the house, see? And he would walk down to the pantry and walk back upstairs and of course the joy of being released, you know, just was incredible. I think that that divine energy that was really him was gone. It was back in the universe with that eternal life.

But this was a mental concept that was so strong and I've had experience with that before. This is why people should pay attention to their thinking because that stuff floats around and it can lodge in people. I told you about that friend of mine who was getting his PhD and the thing was in his neck, but in that case the energy, it moved back and forth in the house but it didn't get into someone. And that was very fortunate. If it had gotten into someone, the house wouldn't have had a problem, but somebody else would have had a severe physical problem.

And walking around talking about this—you know, this is not the way it looks. It looks like it's empty space and people are individuals and animals are animals and birds are birds. It's an incredible—it's an organism; it's one thing. And it has incredible energy and we recognize that energy through meditation or prayer or chanting and we
harmonize in our life by behaving in a way that recognizes invisible things, truth or beauty or mercy or kindness.

[The incident described above took place in 1972. In 1975, Elizabeth Kelly began a healing group.]

I went to a seminar in Columbus [conducted by] this English metaphysicican, Dr. Baker, and he had a thing about spiritual healing. Well of course I had studied with Paramahansa Yogananda and I was very familiar, you know, but it was very interesting and I enjoyed it. And I had a lot of dear friends there and it’s wonderful to go someplace with a lot of close friends and hear lectures and things that are very inspiring.

But I had an appointment with a woman that night and it was nine o’clock and she came. We got back from Columbus and she came and I realized that she was on the verge of a very--that she really could die. She had been going through a very difficult divorce and her energy was in a very bad place. And I thought, what to do, what to do, and then I remembered from that seminar. And I said to her, "Well, you come on Wednesday, and we’ll do something," and so she said she would come.

And then I remembered, from Paramahansa Yogananda, I remembered five is a very dynamic, very disturbing number. So I invited five people and I said, "I want to do a healing
for this friend of mine." And they were not into, you know, "going to do a healing;" I think they mostly just wanted to see what was going to happen. But they came. That was the main thing, you see. So they came and she came. And here, we put her in the middle and I thought, what'll we do, what'll we do, so we joined hands and I had the tape of that wonderful hymn, "Oh God Beautiful," so we chanted "Oh God Beautiful" three times and I gave her a special blessing. I thought of Babaji and his wonderful sister, and of course Kuan Yin is always in my heart, and Paramahansa Yogananda and Swamiji Yuketswar; I just thought of all of them. And she had to take her shoes off and lie down.

And then I received a note from her and she said that it was so extraordinary; she felt this energy come up through her feet and out through the top of her head and her feet were so swollen that she couldn't put her shoes on. She had to drive home in her stocking feet. But she said she was fine, completely recovered. See, she didn't know how ill she was. She knew she didn't feel well, but I knew if that continued she would be dead.

And so when she was completely recovered, then the people who were there wanted to come the next Wednesday because they felt that it helped them, and then, so from then on--. That was 1975. Right here. They came until I think it was 1978. And Bob got tired. I'd had the carpet cleaned; the man said it was the filthiest carpet he ever
saw. And then for a year I didn’t do it. And then, dear Diane said we could go to her place, and then we went to Antioch. [Rockford Chapel]

You see, when you get a group of people together with the idea of healing, it’s enormously powerful because the energy is multiplied by the square root, you know, not addition. The reason I talked to them [before the actual healing service began] was because people were always late, and then when I thought that everybody was there that was going to come, then we’d do a meditation to get them into the mood for the healing. And then we joined hands and chanted and then we did Om afterward because I felt that you had to— you expand all that energy and then you had to kind of close it up and put it back together. And so it seemed to me a very normal [sequence].

Then after I was ill in 1983—I had that blocked bowel, you know—I would go when I could but it was very difficult. And then Margot sort of did it. And so I felt that it was taken care of and I didn’t have to worry about that anymore. Then Gail asked me to go to the bookstore [for talks on dreams and on Tarot] and I like to do that because it helps. I try to do it so that whatever religious affiliation they have it will fit in with that— it’s really just realization, you know— so they don’t feel they have to do something else, and it’s really reinforcing.

Yes, that’s how it all happened. But I never think, "I’m
a great healer and these people are coming and I’m going to make them well." No, I just recognize need. I just try to do what I can, you know, and I am not always absolutely certain that it’s going to work. The only thing I’im certain of is that at the moment, that is all I can do. And then of course I always have twenty-twenty hindsight and think, oh, I should have done this or that.

We are all healers. The capacity to heal comes from the realization that we are part of the distant stars. You know, Carl Sagan, who thinks astrology and all of that is nonsense, nevertheless, he says you are part of the distant stars. How we recognize truth is purely individual and it doesn’t diminish the truth to see it from one angle or to see it from another. It’s still truth. And I think it’s unfortunate to get hung up on one’s own point of view and say this is the only religion or the only perspective, because it’s so limiting. But wanting to heal and realizing that we are part of the universe, and that it is benign and then actually touching the person and conveying this to the person, is very powerful.

[Since the mid to late 1980’s, Elizabeth Kelly has practiced Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism. She feels this is a natural evolution of her spiritual path. She has not repudiated Paramahansa Yogananda, but rather feels he led her to Buddhism. Her encounter with the Dalai Lama was}
perhaps an indication that her path would eventually take this direction. In our talks she told me a friend had said she was "the most Oriental Occidental he had ever met." She feels she has been a Buddhist, in the sense of her values and world view, long before she became formally involved. Liz describes a childhood connection to the Buddhism she now practices:

Well, when I was in about the third or fourth grade I remember we had an art teacher that would come and they would read something and then we would illustrate it. And I remember that it seemed to me so important--it was something about worshipping. And so I thought that mine would be--nobody paid any attention to it. In fact they didn't think it was relevant. But to me it seemed the most significant thing.

But I drew the back of this monk which obviously was Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddhist monk--from the back. I just felt that that illustrated that particular story. But I had such an attachment to that drawing. I remember it was very significant to me and I was a little disappointed that nobody else related to it, but it didn't diminish its value to me. There was something about it that I found extremely comforting; and it wasn't until I had really learned Gongyo that it came to me that that was the connection.

When you get older, one of the things that happens is
that things that you were never able to figure out, but that were very meaningful, become clear. And it’s as though it’s finally making sense. It would not necessarily be relevant to others, but in your own life you have a comprehensive view.

I became interested in chanting when I could see the transformation in [my friend]. I saw this absolute, incredible change--really transformation, and I thought, my goodness, I had better get into that. Its great appeal for me is the transformation I saw in her and in my own life. You know, I had to use a walker for seven years. And it’s really--I don’t know how it works. Actually, I just know that it’s a connection. But I know that if people just tell themselves over and over that they’re loved and understood and cared for, they have the same thing. You know, it’s a realization of truth. But Dr. Jung says ritual is so powerful. And it’s very comforting to do it.

The most transforming thing is to recognize our own faults. And it’s so painful. But I have learned in chanting in front of the Gohonzon that this can become painless. It’s a revelation. It’s more seeing what needs to be done rather than what you have failed to do in the past, so it’s not painful, but very gratifying; it’s invigorating; gives you more courage and more stamina, you know; you feel you can do it, you can do it. It’s a divine grace.

113
This form of Buddhism is so appealing to me because you gain a sense of your own power through using the Gohonzon and recognizing what a powerful thing it is when a person has really wanted to help people and translated that whole sutra into just a chant. You know, if you say "Japan" you mean the whole country, the whole history, past, future, everything, all the people, but it’s just one word. So when you say devotion, nam,—but it’s really a Sanskrit word. It means universal awareness and devotion. It’s really beyond comprehension.

Then, the Buddhists, of course, don’t believe in God. They believe the universe is run by law. And they believe that we recognize the law when we treat people the way we would want to be treated, when we have awareness, you know, we’re not locked in our own [little world.] And cause and effect just helps us to realize that we are making our little world and if we want to change it we have to change ourselves, not everybody else.

I think we have to trust the universe; and just do what we can. Actually, when you get off into this it’s very much like flying around without any compass or too much to hang onto, you know? It’s very disorienting. And this is why the more you can have some idea of how you relate to the universe, how you relate to the divine, that is your total security. Then you can just cope with the day and it’s so much better not to have expectations or hopes but just do
what needs doing. Amazing—and it’s taken me years to realize this—amazingly, it becomes easier to cope with.

In the fall, when I was lecturing on dreams, this man and woman, they sat like that, you know, and I knew they really needed to be helped. And so I really urged them—I urged everybody—to chant. The next month, when I came to the lecture, I sort of looked for those people, because I was hoping, you know, they might be there, and when the thing was over, I didn’t recognize them. They had been chanting. And just sat up like people. Incredible difference. Just incredible. And I didn’t mention the Gohonzon or the NSA, you know, just chant, just chant. See, there are many Buddhist sects that chant. This NSA is the only one that uses the Gohonzon.

I think any chanting, Gohonzon or not, will change life. I think the great blessing of that is that we need a certain amount of mental, physical and spiritual activity every day in order for the life to be balanced. And I think our society and our mores and everything don’t give us enough spiritual nourishment or allow us enough.

I think everybody’s supposed to pray every day and I always urge everybody, before I even knew about chanting, to practice gratitude because that helps, you know. Well, it makes you aware. It’s awareness. Dr. Jung says that becoming conscious is what it’s all about. And the thing is that when people become conscious and realize that other
people are just part of themselves, then you have a concern 
over if they’re fed or hungry or can something be done and 
not that just oblivious, just nothing is there, you know. 
They can go on for hours abut this happened and that 
happened and (laughter) you keep waiting for something 
because that’s just par for the course. But you have to 
listen because you can’t be sure. People have to have 
confidence.

I tell them, always, in the beginning, that we could all act like Hitler, and we could all act like Mother Teresa, 
and this is the way we are and so let’s get on with it. 
It’s just safe to assume that everybody has gone through 
such harrowing experiences that they can’t speak of them, 
and that they’ve had such insights and understanding that 
you can talk at any level; they can completely understand. 
And then you can get on with living.
1. In *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramahansa Yogananda explains, the Sanskrit root of *kriya* is *kri*, to do, to act and react; the same root is found in the word *karma*, the natural principle of cause and effect. *Kriya Yoga* is thus "union (*yoga*) with the Infinite through a certain action or rite (*kriya*)." A yogi who faithfully practices the technique is gradually freed from karma or the lawful chain of cause-effect equilibriums (Yogananda 275).

2. Richard Causton explains, the basic practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism consists of chanting the phrase *Nam-myoho-RENge-Kyo* to the Gohonzon, a scroll inscribed with many Chinese and two Sanskrit characters. This is supported by the daily practice of morning and evening *gongyo*, the recitation of two key chapters of the Lotus Sutra, followed by chanting *Nam-myoho-RENge-Kyo* "to your heart’s content" (Causton 13).
Elizabeth Kelly: Chronology

Born, St. Louis, Missouri  
Parents separated  
Parents divorced  
Lived with godparents in St. Louis  
Mother remarried, moved to Cleveland  
Half-sister born  
Moved to Philadelphia  
Moved to Wildwood, New Jersey  
Moved to Washington, D.C.  
Heard Paramahansa Yogananda speak, Wash. D.C.  
Attended school, Gunston Hall, Wash. D.C.  
Moved to Cleveland  
Met Bob Kelly  
Married Bob Kelly  
First son, Christopher, born  
Second son, Tom, born  
Third son, Rick, born  
Moved to Springfield, Ohio  
Started theater work  
Fourth son, Paul, born  
League of Women Voters  
Moved to Yellow Springs, Ohio  
Prophetic reading  
Saw Dalai Lama, Madison, Wisconsin  

Aug. 11, 1912  
1912-1919  
1919  
1920  
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1922-1929  
1926  
1929-1930  
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1939  
1948  
1952  
1953-1961  
1961  
1963  
ca. 1972
Performed exorcism 1972

Started healing group 1975

Initiated into Kriya Yoga 1976

Spiritual Journey published 1987

Joined NSA 1988

Interviewed for oral history project 1989-97
CHAPTER 3 PART 1

A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

The last twenty years have been the happiest of my life, and I finally realized it was because I didn’t have to put up with [my sister] or my brother or my mother.

As Susan N.G. Geiger writes in an article on women’s life histories,

Regardless of differences in culture, class, race, ethnicity, or religion, women seem to share a condition of familial "embeddedness" that is central to the way we, as women, experience and construct the social world. . . .The critical feminist question. . . . is whether and under what conditions such embeddedness is either internalized and taken for granted, or seen as problematic and questionable (Geiger 348).¹

Elizabeth Kelly’s descriptions of her family of origin throughout her life story, combined with her comments about marriage and motherhood, reveal her perception of her
"embeddedness" in the family as "problematic and questionable." While she did not usually express her dissatisfactions in terms of gender issues, but rather in terms of the learning that she saw as necessary to her spiritual journey, looking at her life story from a feminist perspective reveals the constraints that gender put upon her. A feminist perspective also reveals the ways that the role she currently occupies may be seen as a strategy for gaining greater power and fulfillment within those constraints.

While I may seem to be imposing a feminist analysis on Elizabeth Kelly's life story, this will seem less the case if one accepts Carolyn Heilbrun's point that, "'Feminist ideology' is another word for trying to understand, in the life of a woman, the life of the mind" (Heilbrun 16). Indeed, in Elizabeth Kelly's childhood and in the roles that were available to her as a young woman, perceptions, talents and abilities that the role of spiritual teacher and healer has enabled her to express, were consistently blocked. While this role is also in many respects a female role, it is one in which greater power and a wider range of expression are available to her. As Carol Shepherd McClain points out, "Feminist anthropologists have noted [that healing roles] can permit women to achieve status and prestige outside their domestic lives" (McClain 2).

The family has been one of the chief instruments in the
socialization of women and the perpetuation of traditional female roles. As Johnnetta Cole writes, "... within families, the young are socialized, taught the ways of the larger 'American culture,' as well as the ways of their particular racial and ethnic community, class, and gender" (Cole 108). Liz describes her early family life as one of severe emotional and sometimes physical abuse and neglect. Her parents were divorced when she was three, and she and her older brother were left vulnerable to the violent mood swings of an emotionally unstable mother. "My mother had a tremendous influence on my life that I didn't realize," Liz remarks.

Bettina Aptheker writes, paraphrasing Adrienne Rich,

...it is from other women that we learn, at a subliminal and nonverbal level, the boundaries of the possible within a patriarchal, exploitative, and racist world. Rich wrote: "The most notable fact that culture imprints on women is a sense of our limits. The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities. .. (Aptheker 19).

Providing her with a sense of possibility was something, however, that Elizabeth Kelly's mother was unable to do. Trapped within her own difficulties, the result of gender
and class inequities, combined with her own individual ways of coping (or not coping), she modelled instead powerlessness and helplessness. Her mother was, Liz believes, a victim of childhood sexual abuse by her father. Only within the past fifteen years has the mental health establishment begun to recognize the pervasiveness of incest and sexual abuse in our society and the devastating effects on its victims. Feminist scholars have begun to pay particular attention to the fact that "about one in three women" (Maltz 4) has been a victim of childhood sexual abuse. It is now thought that a significant percentage of women who have been hospitalized for mental illness, as well as of those who seek psychological counseling, were sexually abused as children (Briere 3). The role that sexual abuse, especially incest, plays in sex role socialization is also becoming clear. As Kathy K. Swink and Antoinette E. Leveille point out,

Incest is the extreme expression of a patriarchal society. It trains the young victims from the start that their place/purpose/function in society is the needs of others, especially of males. . . .Females generally tend to adopt the victim role and maintain it since it is supported by our patriarchal culture (Swink and Leveille 119).
As an incest victim, Liz’s mother would have been socialized to helplessness and powerlessness (Briere 3). Without some kind of intervention, these attitudes must have influenced her children, especially her daughters, and especially Liz, since she was the daughter with whom she had the greatest contact. A telling example is provided in Liz’s story of her lost opportunity, as a young woman, to strike off on her own. Liz describes an incident when she was shopping with her mother and met an old school friend who worked in the store. The young woman urged Liz to apply for a job there and said they could live together. Liz’s mother said, "No, you can’t do that." Liz herself felt she could not. "I had a very helpless feeling, like I just couldn’t do it." This incident reveals her mother’s dependency upon her and her refusal to allow her a life of her own. It shows the sense of limitation she unwittingly instilled in her daughter. And it shows the cultural assumption that daughters fulfill caretaking roles within the family, roles that preclude the living out of any personal quest.

In contrast, her father and godparents, privileged, respectively, by gender and class, modelled for her the possibility of another sort of life, a life of beauty, education, culture and order. Her father was a "glamorous figure" who would take her to beautiful dinners at the Mayflower hotel in Washington and who sent her to boarding
school during her high school years. She believes that, unlike her mother, her father realized the value of education, and would have sent her to college had she been a better student. Her godmother, again in contrast to her mother, "seemed to be able to live. The house was always pleasant, and everything was clean and it was well-managed. . . .Life was very orderly." Her godparents, of German descent, were "marvelous cooks" whose European kitchen made a great impression on her as a child, as did their frequent attendance at the opera, concerts and the theatre.

Though for most of her childhood she was physically separated from her father and godparents, their influence expanded "the boundaries of the possible" (Aptheker 19). "The thought of my father has always been very nourishing and sustaining," Liz says. Her father and godparents provided an alternative vision of life to the one she was experiencing on a daily basis, however out of reach it may have seemed, a vision she has come closer to realizing in her life and work today.

Her mother's mental instability and her father's leaving the family both had a powerful impact on Elizabeth Kelly's young life, and both can be seen, at least in part, within the context of gender dynamics. While Liz's mother did remarry, Liz says she never felt much connection to her stepfather. The lack of relation to male figures in her childhood, coupled with a fused or enmeshed relationship
with her mother, perhaps made it difficult for her to establish a separate identity. Nancy Chodorow writes, "Girls who grow up in family settings which include neither other women besides their mother nor an actively present father tend to have problems establishing a sufficiently individuated and autonomous sense of self" (Chodorow 212). These family dynamics also confined her to the world of women, which was, even more so in her time, a marginalized one, one she associated with powerlessness and victimization.

In light of these facts about Elizabeth Kelly's family history, it becomes clear why she has had to learn, and why in her teachings she emphasizes, "We are not here helpless victims." Her effort, she says, is to help people to realize their own power, as she has had to realize hers. Empowerment has not traditionally been a part of female socialization. Indeed, Liz felt acutely the confinement of growing up female. Although she does not often describe her experiences in terms of gender, she does recall feeling bitter that her life was more restricted than that of her brother:

He was a boy; and he could go wherever he wanted to go; all he had to do was--they would say be back at, whatever, and out he would go, and I couldn't go anywhere. . . . I never thought it was protection, I just
thought it was being caged and imprisoned, and in my heart I was very bitter.

Although her brother attended college, she does not recall having any definite dreams or goals of what she might be. During one interview, she remembered that she had wanted to be an opera singer, "and finally they drilled it into me that I could not carry a tune and so I couldn’t possibly be an opera singer. And after that there seemed hardly any reason to live." Later, she recalls, "Tragically, all I could think of was what I didn’t want. . . . Actually, I should have become a writer. All my teachers realized that I did have [talent]." But she received no support or encouragement from her family in pursuing this goal. Perhaps even more important, at a very young age she learned not to talk about the things she knew and saw, for fear of being "put away." This was the beginning of a silencing that was to continue until her fifties.

The sexism within the family mirrored, of course, the sexism of the larger culture, and in this sense Elizabeth Kelly’s struggle was typical of that of other women of her race, class and generation. "Women my age could only be what their husbands or fathers or sons or brothers were," Liz says. She was born in 1912, eight years before women had gained the right to vote. By the time she entered young adulthood and was making important life choices, the women’s
movement had, by one account, "virtually collapsed from exhaustion" (Freeman 541). As Jo Freeman explains,

Sometime during the 1920s, feminism died in the United States. It was a premature death--feminists had just obtained that long-sought tool, the vote, with which they had hoped to make an equal place for women in this society--but it seemed irreversible. By the time the suffragists' granddaughters were old enough to vote, social mythology had firmly ensconced women in the home, and the very term feminist had become an insult" (Freeman 543).

In addition, the economic pressures of the Depression were severely constricting lives, female and male. The pressures of the traditional female role plus these economic pressures left Liz little room for choice as to the direction of her life.

Lenore J. Weitzman observes, in discussing what Sheila Tobias calls "the terminal year of school," that women who attend college may postpone taking on the pressures of female role expectations. College provides them with a kind of "moratorium" during which they may set the concerns of finding a husband aside. It also allows them some room for their own self development. In contrast, women who do not attend college feel the pressure to begin fulfilling their
role immediately upon graduation from high school. This is usually a class difference. "But whenever it comes," Weitzman writes, "[the terminal year] brings the same pressures to marry and settle down--to find a husband, to buy a home, to have children--and to fulfill one’s role as 'a woman'" (Weitzman 193). What this has meant, traditionally, has been the severe restricting of a woman’s life.

Because of the Depression and her family’s lack of interest in her education, Liz was not able to attend college or even to finish high school. It seems to have been assumed that she would marry, but until she did, it was also assumed that she would stay home and take care of her mother. Though she was not actively in search of a husband during this period, she was still inextricably caught in a role that allowed no room for the living of her self. "Those years before I was married," Liz remembers,"were very, very unhappy."

But marriage itself was not something she feels she had much choice about either. "I sincerely felt that I had no choice because it was the Depression and I think everybody felt that they were just coping with situations." Liz was married in 1934, during the depths of the Depression, which meant, of course, severe economic restrictions. Marriage and motherhood also meant continued "embeddedness" within the family. The psychological burdens upon her were
increased not only by the continued dependency of her family of origin, but also that of her in-laws. And in a little over a year, her first child was born.

Childbearing and rearing without much sympathy or support added to her difficulties. She was ill during her first pregnancy; she had another child in 1936 and another in 1939. She had primary responsibility for child care and remembers the difficulties of raising three small children: "The oldest child wasn’t four when we had the three and taking care of the children was very difficult. I think [Bob] always did as much as he could. It was never very much, but it was all he was capable of." Although she tried to hold a job to support the war effort, she was forced to quit because of the unavailability of adequate child care.

The life she describes during these years was severely circumscribed, not only by the demands of caring for young children but also by financial limitations:

When I look back, it’s a miracle that we ever survived, with practically no clothing; we had food and shelter, but nothing, nothing else. . . . It’s terribly hard, terribly. It’s depressing because you can’t dream, because it’s so precarious you have to concentrate upon just what’s happening.

Significantly, what she found most difficult about
poverty is that "you can’t dream." Liz has always had a rich imaginative life. While she genuinely enjoyed being a mother--she says, "My children have always been the great joy and blessing of my life. I was never happy until I had the children,"--there always seemed to be, since childhood, another side of her longing for expression: the dreamer, the writer, the artist, the mystic. I believe that in motherhood Liz found the self-esteem, nurturing and affection she had never received in her own childhood and that she has always seen the role of mother as an important and powerful one. Indeed, this role has provided her with knowledge and skills that are crucial to the work she does today. However, insofar as the two crises of her adult life that she told me about both concerned the mother role, it was clearly not without its problems. These two crises could be seen to represent conflicting sides of herself: what I will call the artist/mystic and the mother. I do not wish to suggest that these are necessarily and inevitably opposed, but that our society, which dictates that women hold the primary responsibility for child care and that indeed this is a woman’s primary role, often forces a woman to choose between them. Seen together, these two crises show the psychic costs of such a choice.

After her last child, who was born when she was forty, feeling she was "very ill," she sought medical help. Her physician recognized that she was going through a traumatic
readjustment in her life with the birth of a late child. However, rather than help her to find ways to integrate some of her newfound freedom with child-care, perhaps enlisting the help of her husband or the older children, he prescribed a tranquilizer, Valium, which she then took for the next eight years. This indicates clearly how, as Ihsan Al-Issa points out, "Drugs may be used to help a woman to function within the prescribed sex role rather than to take political action or to seek social solutions to their problems" (43).5

The second crisis came ten years later, when her older children began leaving home and she was threatened with the loss of this role which had become central to her identity. "I really thought I was Snow White, you know, and the seven Dwarfs," Liz says, "and it was always going to be like that." As Pauline Bart argues, "Role loss is associated with depression" (Bart 176), and "the departure of children is more difficult for women whose primary role is maternal" (Bart 168). In the early sixties there was little recognition of what we now call "empty nest syndrome," and little support for a woman going through such a major change. Bart explains,

Few clear norms govern the relationship between a woman and her adult children; consequently, when her children leave the woman's situation is normless. . . .there are no guidelines, no rites de passages for the mother
herself to guide her through this transaction (Bart 168-169).

Her problems were complicated by valium withdrawal, the effects of which her physician had not prepared her, and by the fact that her mother, mother-in-law and aunt, all of whom had been "dominating" and "manipulating" figures, had all died within this same period. Thus she was dealing simultaneously with drug withdrawal, bereavement and the loss of a significant role. But like other women of her time who had been influenced by "the feminine mystique," she had been conditioned to perceive these difficulties as evidence of her mental instability rather than as indicative, at least in part, of problems created by the female role. As Carolyn Heilbrun writes,

Consciousness raising, as far as it went, revealed to the white middle-class women who took part in it that, isolated in nuclear families, they suffered individual guilt, each supposing herself a monster when she did not fit the acceptable narrative of a female life. It is questionable how much any individual woman before the women’s movement was helped by individual therapy or advice. What became essential was for women to see themselves collectively, not individually, not caught in some individual erotic and familial plot and inevitably
found wanting (Heilbrun 45-6).

Lacking such a perspective, however, Liz says, "I just knew that I was coming unglued."

Indeed, the theme of mental illness is a recurrent one in Liz's life story. Throughout, she reveals a self perception as "mentally off," or "backward." As a child she felt like she had been "put down in Mars." Liz has said that all her life she "never fit in." Her feelings of difference may have derived in part from the emotional abuse she suffered as a child. But she was also encouraged since childhood to view her psychic abilities as evidence of mental aberration: "I would tell my brother things I saw and knew, and what I felt, and he told me if I kept talking like that, they would just put me away." She often speaks of her not fitting in as a sign of ignorance or self-indulgence, as indicative of her own failings and inability to cope. But as Heilbrun notes, "Misfits are often our most gifted children and, for girls, those most likely to require a different story by which to write their lives" (Heilbrun 106). Her response to this second crisis, when she felt she was "coming unglued," shows her beginning to write that new story.

Marilyn J. Mason has pointed out that empty nest syndrome is often the surfacing in a woman's life of unresolved childhood issues that the traditional role of
mother has distracted her from (Mason 54). Certainly the death of her own mother, for whom she had such ambivalent feelings, at the same time as her older children were leaving, would have caused pain and turmoil that she could not escape. With this second crisis, I believe the artist/mystic self that had so long been suppressed was also emerging. For she responded to this crisis, not by being hospitalized, or by taking more drugs, but by moving to a different community, one that she had always perceived as tolerant of diversity. On some level she was ready to give that suppressed self room in which to live.

This decision also suggests an understanding, perhaps an unconscious one, that part of her problem was social and political. When she lived in Springfield, she felt "in an alien culture." In contrast, she felt that in Yellow Springs she would be "at home." She says of Yellow Springs,

Oh, it's a refuge, it's definitely a refuge. If there's a place for birds and beleagured animals, this is one for humanity. And I have felt that without it I would have perished; definitely; yes; because if you feel completely misunderstood and misinterpreted and you can go someplace where you are so at home that people don't even pay attention to you, . . . , there's no way to describe how comforting that can be.
And indeed, it was in this new community, in Yellow Springs, that she began in earnest her spiritual path and the work she continues to do today. This move can thus be seen, in Heilbrun’s words, as an "unconscious decision to place [her] life outside the bounds of society’s restraints and ready-made narratives" (Heilbrun 50).

"[W]omen are well beyond youth when they begin, often unconsciously, to create another story" (Heilbrun 109). Indeed, by the time she moved to Yellow Springs, she was fifty and had only one child at home. The centrality of the role of mother to her self-identity is apparent in her initial difficulty in giving it up: "After they were grown up and married, then I thought, ‘What do mothers do? Mothers do holidays. Mothers do Easter and Christmas,’ and so I could do that and I had wonderful dinners and Christmas and all this. I did that over and over." But from the perspective of a wiser present, she adds, "I had no idea it was a big nuisance. I didn’t know. That’s how dumb I was... And I kept this up, for years, really until I was physically unable to do it. Then it was big sighs of relief; we don’t have to do that anymore." Now that she has made the transition to a new role, to a larger identity, she can admit her relief at no longer being bound to the demands of physical nurturing.

Although she still does her share of it, often taking in people and animals who need a place to stay, finding food
and clothing for friends in trouble, (she once referred to her home as "The Sheltering Arms"), or cooking wonderful meals for her husband or for friends who visit--her primary work today is in teaching, expressing her vision, and providing emotional and spiritual nurturance. Significantly, she does her readings and much of her counseling at her dining room table. The room itself has become her work space and is lined with her books and artifacts. Hence, rather than having given up the role of mother, she has transformed it. She is still a nurturer, but the kind of nurturing she now does is tied to her own personal quest. In this work she has managed to integrate or to combine two sides of herself that had been in conflict: the artist/mystic and the mother.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf exhorts women to remember that "our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women" (Woolf 118). Traditionally, women have been confined to and "embedded" within the world of relationships. "The world of reality" has been the domain of men. Yet throughout history there have been women writers, artists, saints and mystics who have seen that domain as also belonging to them. "A long time ago," Liz says, "I decided there was just God and I, and anything else just had to be coped with." Her statement reveals her profound loneliness. It also reveals a mystical nature that can be seen to have been pressing for
expression her entire life.

In an explanatory note that Liz wrote about a mandala she had painted depicting "the meaningful experiences of my spiritual life," she says, "My beginning of a sense of reality came in a dream of snakes." I asked if by "sense of reality" she meant a spiritual awakening and she said it did. However it was clear that she was also awakening to the realities of her own life which she had up until then denied. Ethical concerns prevent me from disclosing the nature of her discovery. Perhaps for my purpose, however, what is most important is that this awakening occurred around the same time that she went off the Valium. In other words, the drug, a tranquilizer which, from a feminist perspective can be seen to have been used to help her to function within her prescribed role, fostered the denial of certain crucial truths about her life, while the realization of these painful truths led her to the spiritual life and ultimately to the work she does today. Liz does say, "We are led to truth and understanding as we are strong enough to endure it," and that "if I had been exposed to the realities of my life at that time, I could not have endured it." But the culture's insistence that women concern themselves more with caretaking and with relationships than with what Woolf calls "reality" and that they suppress their own true knowing encourages women to exist in states of denial. From an early age Liz was encouraged to suppress in
herself the very source of her power, her unique vision of the world.

Adrienne Rich has said, in discussing the woman writer, "to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination" (Rich 43). I believe the same thing may be said of the mystic or spiritual seeker. But she adds, "The word traditional is important here. There must be ways, and we will be finding out more and more about them, in which the energy of creation and the energy of relation can be united" (Rich 43). In the unique life and work she has fashioned for herself today, I believe Elizabeth Kelly shows us one of those ways.

It is unusual for a woman to be able to say, at the age of seventy-nine, "It's the best my life has ever been." But Elizabeth Kelly has made this statement or statements to this effect, more than once. "The last twenty years have been the happiest of my life," she says, "and I finally realized it was because I didn’t have to put up with [my sister] or my brother or my mother." I suspect they have also been the happiest because she has been freed from the caretaking roles that dominated her adult life and released into a life shaped by her own personal quest. In devoting her life to the service of others she is still fulfilling a traditional female role. However, she has transformed that
role into a more powerful and personally satisfying one, one that combines, as Rich says, "the energy of creation" with "the energy of relation."

As The Personal Narratives Group points out, "Women make their own lives (and life histories), but they do so under conditions not of their own choosing. Both individual agency and social structure must be considered" (Personal Narratives Group 5). Having looked at some of the social constraints within which Elizabeth Kelly has lived her life, as well as her strategies for dealing with them, one can appreciate the creative synthesis she has achieved. She has shaped the traditional female role to serve her own most cherished values and goals: guiding others along the spiritual path; she has found a channel for her artistic, psychic and visionary powers; in the performance aspects of her work she has integrated the love of theatre and the arts instilled by her father and godparents; and she has been able to transcend the negative influence of her mother while at the same time carrying on, in her own spiritual path, the spiritual legacy she left her.

Carolyn Heilbrun writes of "women’s as yet unnarrated lives" (Heilbrun 28) and notes, "Biographers often find little overtly triumphant in the late years of a subject’s life, once she has moved beyond the categories our available narratives have provided for women" (Heilbrun 131). We have few narratives of women coming to power in their old age.
We have few narratives of the making of a woman healer. In Elizabeth Kelly's story, told and read as a woman's search for greater fulfillment and power, we see a woman's triumph in old age. "When I look back at life," she remarked, "I see that it has a very fulfilling pattern." As Heilbrun says of the old-age freedom of such a woman, "She may well for the first time be woman herself" (Heilbrun 131).
Notes

1. Although, as Elaine J. Lawless points out, written autobiographies are different from those that are orally delivered, literary scholarship on women's autobiographies is relevant to women's oral accounts of their lives. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, for example, in their book Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography, observe that "self-definition in relation to significant others is the most pervasive characteristic of the female autobiography" (Brodzki and Schenck 8). This "relationality" in women's autobiographies can be compared to the "embeddedness" Geiger speaks of in women's life histories.

2. Mardy S. Ireland notes, "Daughters, it seems, are much more likely to be placed in parental roles. This is especially true if the daughter is the oldest child and/or the only girl" (Ireland 168).

3. In terms of what Elizabeth Kelly had articulated for herself as a young woman, I think her unhappiness as well as her aspirations had more to do with class than with gender, although escaping poverty has also, for many women, meant escaping certain gender restrictions as well, for example access to education. See Carolyn M. Morell's discussion of the interaction of class and gender in women's desires for "more and different" (Morell 37). 

4. Recent feminist scholarship has emphasized the positive aspects of the mother-child bond in women's early childhood development. As Janet L. Langlois explains, "Carol Gilligan makes a case for seeing the empathy developed in this kind of bonding as important for our culture now; Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva see 'la difference feminine' as a way to transcend patriarchal dichotomies in the future" (Langlois 89). Jean Baker Miller "notes that definitions of self in Western psychology emphasize separation and individuation but neglect the intricacies of human interconnection" (Jordan et. al., 4).

I believe that for Elizabeth Kelly, however, because her relationship with her mother was characterized by rejection and because she associated her mother with deprivation and mental instability while her father was perceived as a glamorous figure who was able to escape the chaos of the family home, Chodorow's earlier theories, as summarized by Langlois, are more relevant: For Chodorow, mothers see their daughters as extensions of themselves and so identify with them in a deeper way and for a longer time than they do with their sons, who must separate from them to gain a male identity. For psychoanalytic theory and for the culture at large, Chodorow recognizes that the autonomous self, the self
that can differentiate from others, the male self, is privileged. The relational self, the self that defines itself in connection to others, the female self, is not privileged, yet is essential in the cultural process of nurturing daughters, who will become mothers, and sons, who will separate from them" (Langlois 88).

5. In *Listening to Prozac*, Peter D. Kramer, observing the way drugs may be used in the service of social conformity, notes, "Mother's little helpers were pills--Miltown, amphetamine, barbiturates, Librium, and Valium were the most popular and widely available in the fifties and early sixties--that were used to keep women in their place, to make them comfortable in a setting that should have been uncomfortable, . . . "(Kramer 39).

6. The "feminine mystique" is a phrase coined by Betty Friedan to describe attitudes of the 1950's in the U.S. which confined middle class white women to domestic roles. Women were expected to find fulfillment within these roles and when they did not were labeled "unfeminine" and "neurotic."

7. "The Sanskrit word *mandala* means 'circle' in the ordinary sense of the word. In the sphere of religious practices and in psychology it denotes circular images, which are drawn, painted, modelled, or danced" (Jung 3).
"In the early women's movement," Elayne Rapping writes, "we had a . . . 'master narrative'":

. . . one is born and socialized female. One wallows in oppression blindly. One sees the light of feminism, joins the movement, changes one's life--and one's society--and becomes free. Only, as times changed and things didn't go so quickly or easily that way, we changed the story line. Now, there was a new chapter, a 'backlash' chapter, in which male power fought back and won; in which, once more, we found ourselves held back and put upon (Rapping 9-10).

As a woman who came of age during the second wave of the women's movement in the United States, I have been profoundly influenced by this narrative, however outdated it has now become, in the way I view my own life and the lives of other women. But it is clear that, for Elizabeth Kelly, the feminist "master narrative" is not the lens through which she views her experience. Her "master narrative," in
contrast, is one of spiritual awakening. According to this story, one is born human and socialized in a particular family and culture at a particular period in human history; one founders in ignorance and delusion blindly; one awakens to spiritual truth, devotes one's life to God and to the service of humanity and becomes free. Instead of the feminist "click," Elizabeth Kelly speaks of "wake-up time at El Rancho." Both narratives assume transformation, a change of consciousness that changes lives, but with very important differences.

The religious attitude, defined by William James in its broadest terms as "the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto" (James 55), has always been at the center of Elizabeth Kelly's life, preparing her, in a sense, for the realizations she would come to later, and for the work she would ultimately do. For, like the women ministers Elaine J. Lawless studied, Elizabeth Kelly had an "early affinity for religion" (Lawless 1993, 148).

Liz was exposed to the mainstream Christianity of the Lutheran church through her godparents (as well as the Roman Catholic church after marriage), to the younger, more eccentric Christian Science church through her stepfather's family, and to Eastern religions and the occult through her mother and grandfather. Religion and what I will call spiritual or supernatural experiences had a significant
enough impact on her young life to shape her as a spiritual seeker ever after. In the healing of her cat through prayer, for example, she learned "that there were enormous energies in life that people could use," a realization that would prove central in her work later. The meeting with Paramahansa Yogananda, when she was fifteen, carried with it a sense of destiny and special blessings:

[H]e knew why I was there. I never knew why I was there; but he knew. And he smiled. He had the most wonderful smile. . . . At the time it seemed like a warm, loving recognition. But later in my life I realized what a benediction, what a great blessing [it was.] And whenever things seemed very, very, very difficult, I would always remember that.

This encounter provided her with a sense of spiritual guidance and security which she would return to in adult life through study of the Self Realization teachings and the sharing of this wisdom in her guidance of others.

Indeed, spiritual teachers have been important throughout her life. Her meeting with the Dalai Lama, which she describes after her narration of encounters with Paramahansa Yogananda, and which took place when she was an adult, was also perceived as a great blessing. Later, as she became involved in NSA Buddhism, she would recall a
drawing she did as a child that seemed very significant to her and that she only realized with her involvement in NSA was the thirteenth century monk, Nichiren Shosho. Thus her early life had exposed her to important influences that she returned to in times of crisis and that helped her find a new direction. Indeed, her life was "transformed," she said, when in her fifties she set in earnest upon a spiritual path.

In telling me the story of how she "came to spiritual endeavor," Liz described several turning points in her life which I discussed in the previous section mainly in terms of gender issues. Looking at these turning points from the perspective of spiritual awakening shifts the lens and provides other, perhaps more important, insights. One of these crises came when she was facing the deaths of several loved ones and the loss of an important role. At this point in her life, shortly after she and her husband had moved the family to Yellow Springs, she felt she was very ill. She had in fact moved to Yellow Springs to avoid a psychiatric hospitalization and was suffering from severe anxiety and depression. To cope with this crisis, she turned to prayer, to the spiritual wellsprings of her past: "When I prostrated myself--that was in 1962--before the picture of Swamiji Sri Yuketswar and I said, 'I offer you my heart and mind, body and soul. I will be obedient.' Then life was really transformed." In Spiritual Journey she said,
The beginning of the spiritual path is where you have to be courageous. I know, because I've been there. It is like walking to the edge of the Grand Canyon and saying, "Well, God's going to have to take care of me," and you jump over. And all you have is the realization that God will take care of you. And after awhile you get used to falling. Then you can really see, be happy, be loving. But your sense of reality, your sense of direction and timing are irrevocably altered (Kelly 23).

What Liz describes is a complex process of surrendering--to God or to a larger design--and accepting the part she is meant to play in that design; an acceptance of her destiny or purpose, what in Eastern philosophies is called "dharma." Her prostration of herself before the guru resembles Christ's surrender in the words, "Not my will, but Thine be done." This moment of surrender did create a change in the direction of her life. Though it did not happen immediately, she eventually found herself taking on the role of spiritual teacher and advisor, for a year later, she did a reading that turned out to be prophetic:

I did the reading and I said to myself, "If this happens, I will read for anyone who comes." And when it did happen, there was a sound like a heavy door
closing and then I knew that that part of my life had ended. And I had no idea what was going to happen. I just knew that [life] had moved along.

Thus her religious or spiritual life, through the process of surrender to the will of God, made it possible for her inner powers to come to the fore when nothing else in her life had done so.

Liz's experience resembles what William James calls conversion:

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities (James 177).

Basing his discussion on the ideas of E.D. Starbuck, he explains that there are two types of conversion, "the volitional type and the type by self-surrender" (James 192):

Starbuck seems to put his finger on the root of the
matter when he says that to exercise the personal will is still to live in the region where the imperfect self is the thing most emphasized. . . . The act of yielding. . . is giving one's self over to the new life, making it the centre of a new personality, and living, from within, the truth of it which had before been viewed objectively (James 195).

James adds, "... self surrender has been and always must be regarded as the vital turning-point of the religious life" (James 196). By setting aside her personal will and allowing a less conscious side of herself to express, the suppressed self I alluded to in the previous section, or, depending upon one's "master narrative," by allowing God to take over, she came into a life of greater fulfillment. As Ursula King writes, quoting Joann Wolski Conn, "For women, conversion is not so much giving up egocentric notions of power as passing through an experience of nothingness finally to gain power over their own lives" (qtd. in King 111).

But paradoxically, that power over her own life and that greater fulfillment have come through service. I asked her once if she thought her recovery was connected to fulfilling her vocation or answering a call to be what she was supposed to be. "No," she responded. "I think my recovery is due to giving up all expectation. And
concentrating on service. And actually paying attention and seeing if there’s something that can be done. Or if I can recognize a need that can be fulfilled." She explained further,

The thing is that when you get into something like this, what happens is you give everything up and you just open your hands and feet, and say, "I’ll just serve." Then, you have to be constantly aware of if you were that person, what [you would need]. You know, you have to, you can’t think, "I’m hungry" or "I’m tired" or "I want to go to bed" or "I don’t want to do this anymore," ever. You can only think of what needs doing. . . . [T]he thing about service is that if you’re truly in service, you’re never tired. You just keep going. Because you’re not running on your own energy. So you don’t need a vacation or time off or understanding; you just do it. . . . There’s no question of burnout or this is work and then that’ll be fun. It’s just something to do, from morning till night.

While, from a feminist perspective, it is clear that the new direction of her life gave her a wider range of creative expression, a certain amount of status and even eventually an income, she has emphasized many times that what she does has not been a matter of choice. Rather, this
work has been thrust upon her and she has submitted to it as one does to a vocation. "I’m not in this because I had any choice," she said. "I couldn’t get out of it." While she sees this surrender as transforming her life in very positive ways, she also has felt confined by it: "But you see, I didn’t begin this with, ‘I’m going to help the world. Everything’s going to be better.’ It was very much like a jail sentence, that from now on, this was [what life was going to be]."

The work has imposed upon her life certain disciplines:

EK: If you do this, you really have to live like a monk. You can’t, there are a lot of things you just can’t do.
RR: Like what?
EK: Well, you can’t drink coffee or tea.
RR: Why?
EK: Well, you can have a little wine occasionally. It’s too stimulating. You have to really make an effort to be as neutral as possible, because you absorb energies; and you give energies. You have a unity with the person. We have unity with people all the time, but this is more intense. You cannot indulge in hatred. You cannot indulge in any kind of destructive emotion. Which means that you have to constantly pay attention. You can’t ever just sit back and allow your mind to [wander]. You have to watch it all the time.
RR: Do you ever feel restricted?
EK: I feel restricted all the time. (mutual laughter)
What else is there? My little cage; it's mobile, but, . . . you know, it's very restricting.
RR: Are you restricted because physically you can't get around?
EK: Oh no, no, that's the least, no, no mentally you have to constantly be alert.
RR: And that feels like a constraint.
EK: I think it's a recognition of boundaries. I don't think it's confining, but I think it's a realization of where you are, kind of how you have to function in that area. So it isn't really restraining. But it's an awareness.
RR: Have you ever felt like you wanted to leave it behind?
EK: Oh never, I have never felt it was possible. No, I had no idea. No, it doesn't bother me. When I was in Mexico City, Sonia's brother-in-law--I said, "Oh, it is so beautiful here" and he said, "It would be so nice if you could live here, but maybe you couldn't do that."
But my answer to that was it doesn't matter to me where I live. This is very true. Because I don't think that I have too much choice. I don't think anybody does. I think wherever we are is where we're able to function
and do our best and learn the most and the idea that we can—I do think moving changes things dramatically, but I think we move in some kind of orbit and I think that while we might think we’re doing something, I think it fits in. I think if it doesn’t fit in, then there’s a dramatic blow-up and the whole thing will disintegrate. It took me years to realize that just doing the day as well as you could brought about opportunities and things that were really far more reaching and amazing.

"There isn’t one way," Liz wrote, "but there is one way for each individual. Finding that way is the purpose of life." Paradoxically, while one’s "way" might impose certain restrictions on one’s life, it provides a liberation that no other path can provide because through it one gains a sense of "rightness," the conviction that one is following one’s destiny. As Carl Jung explains, "Vocation acts like a law of God from which there is no escape" (Jung 1965, 340). Liz sees herself as an instrument who has willingly "accepted restrictions" in order to serve. While she is devoted to service, however, she knows it is important that one derive benefits from performing it. "However much I do for them [her clients]," she says, "they do much more for me, because there’s nothing an old person likes better than to have someone listen to what they have to say."

Thus Liz’s story is more truly a recovery or spiritual
conversion narrative than a feminist narrative. It reveals how a spiritual awakening helped her to overcome depression and find a purposeful life, one that ultimately has led her to service. In discussing contemporary society’s renewed interest in spirituality and Eastern spiritual disciplines like meditation and yoga, especially in the New Age movement, she commented:

I think it’s a universal energy and I think that I came to it out of absolute mental, physical and spiritual necessity. It saddens me because I feel now like everybody must be in pretty bad shape, because [they recognize] that this is the only help. I don’t think people take a serious interest in yoga or meditation or any of these things until they have a sense of loss or suffering so deep that they’re willing to do something about it. It’s so unbearable that they’re going to make an effort. I don’t think I would have ever become absolutely devoted if I hadn’t realized that I had to do something. I think it’s very common to think that, you know, if we can just hang in there long enough, life is going to become pleasant or people will become kind or we’ll have more understanding and love. (laughter) We don’t have to do anything, but if we just wait it’ll show up, you know. When you finally
recognize that absolutely nothing is going to happen unless you really do something—you know, Ann Landers says that’s waking up and smelling the coffee and I always say [it’s] wake-up time at El Rancho.

"Waking up," however, and becoming free are for Liz matters of changing one’s consciousness and one’s own behavior rather than, as for feminists, changing one’s consciousness and one’s behavior, but also social institutions.

As in feminist discourse, a frequent metaphor of Liz’s discourse is that of the prison or of being trapped or caught. A mandala she put together was entitled, from a Sara Teasdale poem, "Caught in the web of the years that pass."² "We are caught in life," she explained. Her own suffering as well as that of others is often described in terms of restriction:

I believe in the Morita therapy, of course, and I believe Milton Erickson is enormously helpful. Allowing people to recognize that they can do it. They’re not locked in. It’s amazing how often people feel locked in. It seems to me as though there were three walls that are just a prison, but back here there’s nothing. But to get them to turn around is very difficult.
In describing one client she said, "She was in the depths. Well, people just get in--you can get in and you can get out. You don’t have to stay there." Significantly, "turning around" and finding "the way out" comes through a change in thinking:

I would have wanted to be a psychotherapist because--well, when that woman said you’ve gained your freedom I realized how powerful an influence a person can be through their ability to see more. You know, it’s like somebody roaming around in the woods and you say: you can get out over there. You have a different perspective about other people and you can see how they’re caught in a maze of their own thinking and you can just very easily say, "This is the way out," you know, because of your own realization, you see, which is different than learning. Realization is transforming. You see, there’s a difference between believing and knowing and realizing. See, you can believe anything, and knowing has limitations. Two and two will make four and it won’t make anything else, but if you realize two and two makes four you can live on a budget, see. So when you realize that people can become caught in a maze of their own thinking, the only way to reach in is because you know where they are and
you know how they can get out.

The reason Liz knows where they are is that she has been there herself. "I only tell people what I know," she says. "When I was very ill I remember saying to my doctor, 'You cannot comfort others if you cannot comfort yourself. If you can't manage you certainly are in no position to tell other people what to do.'" The way she managed, however, was not so much by changing or escaping restricting circumstances as by changing her attitude toward them. As she says in Spiritual Journey, "If you can't control what happens outside of you, control what happens inside" (Kelly 6). In one of our conversations, Liz said to me:

Oh, you should read Anwar El Sadat's autobiography. It's called In Search of Identity. He was confined to a very narrow cell, number fifty-four, which I think is significant, in the Cairo central prison for four years, and there he recognized that only by changing the fabric of our thinking could we make progress; that we had to see things entirely differently or we couldn't really make any progress.

As Viktor Frankl has shown in Man's Search for Meaning, in situations of extreme confinement the one freedom that
cannot be taken away is the choice of attitude, how one thinks about one's circumstances. Out of an experience of helplessness and powerlessness comes a philosophy of acceptance and surrender and the attempt to find the one area where one may still have some power: within one's own mind. "For what matters above all," Frankl writes, "is the attitude we take toward suffering. . ." (Frankl 178). Frankl believed one can endure anything if one can find meaning in it.

From the feminist perspective of the previous section, one might say that Elizabeth Kelly's discourse is informed by her particular experiences of confinement as a woman. The only freedom remaining to her in difficult circumstances was to choose to see her situation in terms of a larger design and to surrender to it, accepting the yoke of service that women have always borne. I believe such an interpretation, however, falls far short of the mark. As William James has shown, surrendering to a higher purpose, sacrificing self, and serving others are themes running through the religious lives of both men and women. These concepts transcend gender. From a religious perspective, Elizabeth Kelly has accepted her calling and in surrendering herself to a destiny of service, which imposes restrictions on her life, she has herself been freed into a life of greater fulfillment.

The debate hinges on the ways confinement, freedom and
liberation are defined. For both the materialist feminist and the religious individual, confinement means restriction and suffering. But while the feminist sees restriction as the inability, because of social injustice, to have or do what one wants or needs, or to live in the world as the person one feels oneself to be, or to be assured of the basic rights of food, shelter, clothing and safety, the religious, acknowledging that suffering is the human condition, and willingly accepting the suffering of placing the needs of others before her or his own, sees restriction, ultimately, as separateness, as confinement to the limits of the self, the ego. Hence, while for a feminist, liberation is defined in terms of women's role in contemporary society, women's freedom from oppression, not only of gender but of race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation, for the religious, liberation is defined in terms of consciousness, ultimately as union with the divine, and in terms of behavior that manifests an awareness of that union through service to others.

It is in the motif of "the beautiful smile," which appears in so many of Elizabeth Kelly's descriptions of deeply spiritual individuals, that her definition of liberation can be best understood. Kirin Narayan points out, "Laughter has been identified as a recurrent 'psychic motif' in Hindu fiction. . ." (Narayan 181). She notes that Swamiji, the sadhu who is the focus of her study, was also
"often laughing" (Narayan 181). She asks, "Why in all these instances are sadhus associated with laughter? What is it in their relationship toward the world that causes them to laugh" (Narayan 181)? Answering her own question, she writes,

As the Sadhu in the story explains, "Thinking about the ways of the world, I laughed. No one knows what lies ahead. The Lord’s play is strange and marvelous. This is what made me laugh." In other words, he was laughing as someone outside the world viewing those entangled within it. His laughter is associated with his liminality. From the ascetic perspective, the world filled with attachments and plans is nothing but a fleeting illusion: a divine play (lila) (Narayan 181).

The "beautiful smile[s]" of Paramahansa Yogananda, the Dalai Lama, and as will be seen in the stories cited in the next chapter, of Sunflower and the Benedictine nun, also seem to indicate a detachment from this world and its suffering, and to hint at the beauty and benevolence of that "unseen order" alluded to by William James in his definition of the religious attitude. It is to this dimension, the unseen,--a dimension that is not acknowledged by materialist feminism--that Liz has, through her spiritual awakening, been
released. And it is this dimension that lends service a meaning that transcends sex roles. In service, one lives the profound conviction that all beings are one in spirit. As Ursula King writes, "Ultimately, the challenge of the spirit is a trans-sexual one pointing to wider connections and greater sharing beyond all differences" (King 96).

Carolyn Heilbrun writes, "We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts" (37). In our conversations, Elizabeth Kelly would often refer to stories of lives that had inspired her. She found reinforcement of her faith in The Autobiography of a Yogi, by Paramahansa Yogananda. About this work she said,

I think its value is that it's about the spiritual life by a spiritual master and I think that people are able to recognize their own, that they have faith and this verifies it. So it isn't something new. It allows them to realize that they identify with something that they have felt all along.

When she was young she read Thornton Wilder's The Woman of Andros, and thought, "That's the way to live." She also spoke of Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. Both of these women, one fictional, one
historical, "knew that serving was the main thing," Liz says.

The Woman of Andros, set in ancient Greece, is especially interesting as a text that may have helped Elizabeth Kelly to shape a narrative of her own life. The hetaira, Chrysis, a woman of great wisdom and learning, having died to self, had turned her home into "a kind of hospital for the old and the lame" (Wilder 142) and "adopted stray human beings that needed her" (Wilder 152). She also held banquets for the young men of the island at which she recited poetry and taught through fables and proverbs. Chrysis has a redemptive effect on her society through her devotion to service and through "the secret about living" (Wilder 189) that she taught.

While this work seems to have a feminist subtext in that Chrysis was a woman of "dignity and independence" (Wilder 144), one who did not tolerate male disparagements of women and whose teachings revealed an understanding of female oppression, the story concerns itself primarily with a portrayal of her as a spiritual master through whom the young man, Pamphilus, gains a new consciousness.

I believe that in many ways this story parallels Elizabeth Kelly's understanding of life. While she too has a clear awareness of gender inequities, it is the spiritual narrative that provides her the greatest meaning, the greatest solace. With Chrysis she might say,
I want to say to someone...that I have known the worst that the world can do to me, and that nevertheless I praise the world and all living. All that is, is well. Remember some day, remember me as one who loved all things and accepted from the gods all things, the bright and the dark. And do you likewise (Wilder 180).

Elizabeth Kelly’s service to others in the role of spiritual counselor, teacher and healer is tied to her own spiritual journey, and in fact emerged out of personal crisis. David Hufford notes,

This seems to be a rather common pattern among those who become healers in their adult life: disorder and illness, often in a period of great stress; a crisis; inspiration, sometimes accompanied by mystical experiences; . . . revitalization which is generally stable over time provided that some social support is available. Anthropologists have found this pattern typical of the development of shamans in other cultures, but not enough attention has been paid to the life histories of American folk healers to be certain of its frequency and distribution in our culture. My own fieldwork would suggest that it is surprisingly common, especially among healers whose methods are
heavily supernatural (Hufford 1983, 311).

Jeanne Achterberg discusses, along similar lines, "the current popular concept of the 'wounded healer,'" which implies that personal transformation, inner work, or crisis is encountered, directing one toward a healing mission. The experience then allows one to be present more effectively for others who are suffering, and to assist them in their quest for relief or healing (Achterberg 198).

Indeed, what most people consult Elizabeth Kelly about, she says, is "a lack of spiritual conviction." Her response to this need, through stories that point to the reality of a spiritual dimension, is the subject of the next chapter.
Notes

1. With respect to the interpretation of conversion experiences, James writes,

   Psychology and religion are thus in perfect harmony up to this point, since both admit that there are forces seemingly outside of the conscious individual that bring redemption to his life. Nevertheless psychology, defining these forces as "subconscious," and speaking of their effects as due to "incubation," or "cerebration," implies that they do not transcend the individual’s personality; and herein she diverges from Christian theology, which insists that they are direct supernatural operations of the Deity (James 196).

2. The phrase is from the second stanza of Teasdale’s poem, "Come":

   Come, for life is a frail moth flying
   Caught in the web of the years that pass,
   And soon we two, so warm and eager,
   Will be as the gray stones in the grass.
   (Teasdale 48)

3. The differences and similarities between Elizabeth Kelly’s teachings and feminism are addressed at greater length in the conclusion.

4. The Oxford English Dictionary defines hetaira as: a female companion or paramour, a mistress, a concubine; a courtesan, harlot. Sarah B. Pomeroy, in her study of women in classical antiquity, writes,

   Those at the top of this social scale [of prostitutes] were called hetairi, or "companions to men." Many of these, in addition to physical beauty, had had intellectual training and possessed artistic talents, attributes that made them more entertaining companions to Athenian men at parties than their legitimate wives (Pomeroy 89).

   As Pomeroy explains, "The hetaira had access to the intellectual life of Athens" (Pomeroy 92), which was not true of the wife. In The Woman of Andros, the hetaira, Chrysis, combined her intellectual and artistic talents with service to humanity. It is this fact, I believe, which had appeal for Liz.

166
Faith is like measles. You get it from people who have it. That's how I got it. I got it from Paramahansa Yogananda.

--Elizabeth Kelly

As Kirin Narayan writes in Storytellers, Saints and Scoundrels, spiritual teachers throughout the ages have told stories as part of their teaching (Narayan 5). Elizabeth Kelly is no exception to this tradition. Although she teaches primarily through statements about the nature of reality, about the human relationship to the divine and how people should live, she also teaches through the telling of
stories. Stories are often a part of the Tarot readings she does for her clients and they are usually sprinkled throughout her more formal talks and lectures.¹ She also told many teaching stories in the course of the interviews as she recounted her life history. Discussing her use of stories, she commented, "If you tell people things directly there’s resistance, denial or they don’t even hear it," she said in April of 1993, "whereas if you tell a story, they can understand...Stories are like our dreams. They expand our awareness in ways that are less painful than hearing the plain, unvarnished truth."

Scholars who study storytelling have moved from an emphasis on content to an emphasis on process, looking into the context in which stories are told, and focussing on "the storytelling event" as a performance.² Whether telling stories or not, Elizabeth Kelly may most certainly be seen as a performer. As a young woman she was active in community theater, and derived great pleasure from the effect she knew she could have on an audience:

What I really liked was reaching people...I played in The Crucible in a very small part in the beginning and this friend of Dal’s said--I had a long speech--"It’s so amazing to hear that beautiful voice." I never thought my voice was beautiful...And they would sob in the audience. And this one man [a] big man, and I
could just tell he was heartbroken, and that was so gratifying! It made me so happy. And every night I would just try to break everybody’s heart—because life does break your heart. I didn’t think it was me breaking their heart. I thought, it was, this is life, this is the way it is, and it was, actually it was participating, you know, in some enormous thing.

While she no longer participates in the theater, she can now be seen to be performing in different contexts, The Epic bookshop or her own dining room, still moving people with her voice and her use of language. The context in which she gives readings can especially be seen as a performance context. She always plays music on the tape recorder as a part of the reading, and her voice can be heard against the background provided by the music, contributing to the dramatic effect of her words. Everything she brings to the situation: her voice, the music, the incense she always burns, and her own peacefulness, adds to the intensity of the event and the power of her message.

That she sees herself as a performer is evident in the many theater metaphors she uses to describe her work. When we were talking about her correspondence one day and she noted that some of it was "very flattering," she added, "But I think it’s a very important principle that you never read the notices." Once, in preparation for a client, she
referred to the various articles she was gathering together on her table as her "props." And when she allowed several individuals to attend her lectures or workshop presentations for free, she said that was called "papering the house." Clearly, her work today is linked in her mind with her work in the theater.

A detailed performance analysis would, I am sure, yield interesting insights into Liz Kelly's storytelling. For example, one of the things that has always impressed me is the matter-of-fact way in which she recounts spiritual or visionary experiences, as if this reality should be as obvious to everyone else as it is to her. Her profound conviction is reflected not only in what she says but in the way she says it: the use of her voice; her facial expression and gaze; the fact that she speaks in declarative sentences, with no qualifiers or statements of doubt. All of these are key elements in what makes her faith so "contagious" to those who seek her help. As she had said in the interviews, "Faith is like measles. You get it from people who have it. That's how I got it. I got it from Paramahansa Yogananda."

As a person trained in literary analysis, in close readings of texts, my inclination, however, has been to emphasize a thematic rather than a performance analysis of Elizabeth Kelly's storytelling, especially with regard to the worldview that informs the stories and that she perpetuates through telling them. "Worldview," writes Barre
Toelken, "is a general way of referring to the manner in which a culture sees and expresses its relation to the world around it" (Toelken 225). Alan Dundes refines the concept by breaking it down into what he calls "folk ideas as units of worldviews." Dundes explains, "By 'folk ideas' I mean traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man's life in the world" (Dundes 95).

Kirin Narayan writes, commenting on the connection between worldview and her subject's storytelling, "... all the folk narratives that Swamiji uses express themes integral to a Hindu world view that remains recognizable despite historical and regional variation" (Narayan 36). The same may be said about Elizabeth Kelly's stories, which express a "recognizable" worldview, one which, as her life story reveals, she came to as part of her own "spiritual journey" and which she wishes to pass along to others.

Perhaps one might "deconstruct" Elizabeth Kelly's stories, finding contradictory meanings within them as one might in any text. Nevertheless, I believe that those who seek her help or who attend her public talks would agree that she is a spiritual teacher, that she has a particular view of reality that she believes will be helpful to people, and that many of her stories, especially those I have gathered here, serve to, in a sense, persuade her listeners of this view. As Narayan states, "Wherever there is the
demarcated role of religious teacher, it is likely to be associated with storytelling. This person is already seen as a conduit for ultimate truths, and any stories told are viewed as part of this flow" (Narayan 246).

I believe such an approach is particularly appropriate here because Elizabeth Kelly’s worldview, one she has arrived at as a result of struggling with her own difficulties, is such an important element of her healing work. As in all of her other work, her purpose in telling stories, she says, is to "help people realize they are a functioning part of something beyond comprehension" and that "life has meaning and purpose; they can never be deserted." Most people consult her, she said on another occasion, about "spiritual unhappiness--a lack of spiritual conviction." Stories, she says, "give people more confidence, more faith." Indeed, one friend said she went to Liz not so much as a fortune teller, as "for the worldview she presented."

"Faith stories" is, I acknowledge, what anthropologists would call an etic category. That is, I have brought these stories together in a way that Elizabeth Kelly has not. Furthermore, these are not the only stories she tells. She also tells what could be called "how to live" stories, healing stories, humorous stories and many others. But most of her narratives serve her teaching. I choose to focus on these "faith stories," that is, stories that point most directly to the existence of a spiritual reality that is
responsive to human need, and the ways belief in such a dimension shapes human lives, because I think one of the most important and most healing things Elizabeth Kelly does for people is to give them hope. In a sense, her worldview is the "medicine" she administers to those who seek her help.

Her stories are sometimes about saints and wise men, but more often they are personal anecdotes or material she has gleaned from the media or from her reading as relevant to her vision. When I heard her speak at Rockford Chapel in 1982 and '83, two stories she told more than once particularly impressed me and remain in my memory. One was about the discovery that monkeys on two separate islands began, within months of each other, washing their sweet potatoes before eating them. The other was of a dolphin saving a man from drowning. I remember these stories being followed by the statement, "We're one." Both stories illustrate the idea that all life is interconnected. They also suggest a mysterious, benevolent principle operating in nature and in human life; that, as she says, "the universe is bigger" than we imagine. Elizabeth Kelly teaches that how we relate to this principle, "the invisible," as she calls it, is our demonstration of faith.

As in the examples above, Elizabeth Kelly usually tells her listeners the point of her stories, either at the beginning or at the end or both. William Labov, a scholar
who has done influential research on personal narrative, identifies what he considers to be important aspects of personal narratives: "the evaluation of the narrative: the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its raison d'etre: why it was told, and what the narrator is getting at" (Labov 366) and the coda: "...one of the many options open to the narrator for signalling that the narrative is finished" (Labov 365). If we look at the stories that follow we find that each one tells us the point of the story, most often in a coda, but sometimes in introductory comments that are evaluations, and that all of these points reinforce a consistent worldview.

The first time I went for a reading, Liz told me the following story in which a friend had visited a psychic:

EK: She [her friend, Murph] said she [the psychic] told about all these people around her [Murph] and she [the psychic] said, "There's a little Indian girl and her name is Sunflower, and," she said, "she has the most beautiful smile." And then she described a dog that Murph had had years ago and really had loved very much and so Murph was very impressed; and then--that was a Sunday--and the next morning I saw a little Indian girl in the back yard. And I just saw her for a few seconds and she had this beautiful smile. And I knew it
mattered, so I looked at the clock and it was ten minutes after ten, and it was a Monday morning, and I thought, "I have to remember this," and--it was before I did readings--and so we were sitting here having breakfast and he gave me a newspaper and he said, "This will interest you," and it was--

RR: Who gave you a newspaper?

EK: Bob, when I was having breakfast, and he gave me the newspaper and it was about mystics and psychics and I said, "Well, the poor souls don't want to be mystics and psychics, they just can't help it." And I said, "What would you say if I told you I saw a little Indian girl in the back yard this morning?" And he laughed, just the way I knew he would laugh. And I thought, "I hope I live to be old enough to just keep quiet." And so, the whole thing, we forgot, you know. So that Friday they came--they were professional women in Cincinnati and they liked to eat but they didn't like to cook. And so they would come and I would cook and we had a pool table and they would play pool with Bob and have a wonderful time. And so they came and we were having dinner and she said, "I went to Camp Chesterfield and," she said, "this woman was so nice and she told me all these things," and she mentioned her dog, and she said, "And she said there was a little Indian girl here and her name was Sunflower." And she said, "You know, I can't
see anything," she said, "It's hard for me to believe." She said, "You know, the next day when I got in my station wagon and I said, 'Little Sunflower, if you're here, if you're really here, if there's some way you could give me a sign.'" And I said to her, "Was it ten minutes after ten on Monday morning?" And she said, "Yes." She was prompt beyond belief, and she said, "I always get in my car at ten o'clock, but" she said, "that morning I forgot something, and I had to go back." She said, "It would've been ten minutes after ten." And I said, "Well, I saw a little Indian girl in the back yard with a beautiful smile." Well, they raised Appaloosa horses, and so the next time they had a horse they named it Sunflower. And every time that horse put its foot in the ring, it won a blue ribbon. The important part of that story--the most important part--is that it made a true believer out of my husband.

The last statement of this story, the coda, is also an evaluation: the point of the story is that it made a true believer out of her husband. I think Liz tells it in an effort to increase the faith of her listener in the spiritual world. The story shows that a spirit world exists and that for "mystics and psychics" like Liz and the woman at Camp Chesterfield, this world is visible and very real.
It is comforting not only in its suggestion of life after
death, even for beloved animals, but also in its implication
that humans are surrounded by helpful and protective spirits
who can intervene in their affairs. The friend, Murph,--
perhaps like her husband, Bob--had trouble believing, and
Liz’s role in the story was to validate what the psychic had
told her. Her friend had asked for a sign and the sign had
come through Liz, showing that the spiritual realm is
responsive to sincere entreaties. Liz herself becomes a
witness to this fact, and functions as mediator between this
world and the spirit world. This experience reinforced
Murph’s faith in a spiritual dimension, and in telling this
story Liz is attempting to reinforce the faith of her
clients. Liz has told me this story more than once and she
says she tells it to everyone. I believe she does so in an
effort to instill faith.

During the interviews, when we were talking about
prayer, she told me a story about Nathaniel Hawthorne:

I had a marvelous paperback, I don’t know whatever
became of that, but Nathaniel Hawthorne, you know, was
very interested in teaching and he married one of the
Peabody sisters and right after she married they went to
England. . . .They visited many schools and Nathaniel
Hawthorne was immaculate, very fastidious and they
visited this one school and this dreadful little, very
dirty child stayed with him and went every place with him all day and it was really revolting, it was so dirty, but it seemed devoted to Nathaniel Hawthorne. And finally, at the end of the day, the child stood at his knee and just looked up at him and he picked up the child. . . . After he picked the child up and held him, and they were leaving, they didn’t see the child and Hawthorne asked who, you know, about the child, and it turned out that there was no child like that and no one had ever seen the child. But Hawthorne had seen the child. And he had picked it up. And that transformed his life. . . . It was a paperback and I had it for years and I’m sure that I probably gave it to somebody, you know. . . . it said that his faith came from that experience.

Again, the coda here provides the evaluation: "his faith came from that experience." An experience of the supernatural can transform one’s life, and turn one into a believer, just as it did, presumably, for Murph in the previous story and just as hearing the story did for Bob.

Bob Kelly related the following story to me in February of 1990, shortly after I arrived for one of my visits to interview Liz:

I saw my first ghost last night or spirit. I was
sitting on the couch in the living room and I was half asleep, I think, and woke up and I saw this--man, I believe it was, just a couple of feet from me walking toward our front door. He may have only taken a step or two because it only lasted for about two seconds. He was stooped over and it was a charcoal grey, a light grey, figure and I did not see his face, but it appeared to be a man. It lasted only for about two seconds, I would say. And then he disappeared. But, it didn’t scare me; I was just curious as to who it might be, and what he was doing in our house. [laughter]

While telling me this story reveals Bob’s perception of me as someone interested in such phenomena, Liz’s comment on it, in a sense providing the evaluation for her husband’s narrative, again points to the reality of a spiritual dimension and of life after death:

RR: Liz, could you comment on what Bob saw?
EK: Well, I have felt for the past two or three months a presence, but it seems very benign, but I always keep thinking it’s Bob, you know, and then I turn and it isn’t Bob.
RR: You mean you see it too?
EK: No, I haven’t seen it, but I know it’s here. But it seems very benign; it’s probably, I imagine it’s this
dear friend of ours, but I really don’t know... Those things are very helpful because they help people to realize that there is another reality.

While the stories above point to the existence of spirits and of life after death, important elements of Elizabeth Kelly’s worldview, others illustrate her belief in divine guidance and intervention. In one interview, as Liz told me her life story, we were discussing psychics, and she recounted the following:

I had a friend in Springfield, a psychic... She had a very interesting thing occur when she was a very small child. Her parents used to sell vegetables at the market in Springfield. That building is still there... Her family went every Saturday; they went early in the morning. And this time, when they went, she had a little girlfriend--she couldn’t have been very old, I suppose about, she was very young, she must have been about five or six; very young to be left alone, and they had only begun to leave her alone, you know. And she and the girlfriend went down in the basement and opened a keg of wine; it's very, very hard to open a keg of wine and for young girls, practically impossible. But they did it and they poured a large pitcher, and took it upstairs and drank it all. And then there was a lot of
commotion and they went out and there was a cistern between their house--relatives lived over in the next house but there was room, you know, there was maybe two or three lots between them and this cistern was there and this one aunt of hers was her absolute favorite, younger than the others and one that she dearly, dearly loved and she had drowned herself in the cistern. And this friend of mine said that if she hadn’t had all that wine to drink, she would never have been able to endure it because she could see her with her hair floating. But she said because she had all that wine, she was able--But she felt that it had been some kind of divine guidance because it’s really impossible; it’s hard for a man to open one of those kegs, you know, you have to pound and these were just very, you know, tiny children. So she always felt very protected.

The evaluation again appears in the coda: "She always felt very protected." Human beings are surrounded by protective spirits and divine guidance is available to them. This story is similar to the Sunflower story in which the psychic saw spirits around Murph.

The following story was told as part of a talk she gave at Rockford chapel in August of 1990:’

I think the most important thing is never to be
discouraged and to know things will go well. If you just think of it as a divine energy that's beyond comprehension but that is all knowing and you can talk to it, you know. The thing that separates you is your own fear and doubt. Usually when we're in dire straits, we say, "God, God, help us," and we have an immediate sense of being helped because we have not been diverted by our fears and anxieties. We have gone to the source and it is always there. One time, in Cincinnati, my son was quite ill. I didn't realize it and I gave him the car keys and it was a light snow. Cincinnati has dangerous [streets]. So we got on the bridge and the car went out of control and of course I was shouting, "God, God," and my son was so mad, but it was like hands came down and took over the car. And we came up 71 with all those bridges and my friend in the back would say, "Ooh, another car just went off the road! Ooh, another car just went off the road!" and I was terrified and chanting and praying and praying. We finally pulled into the driveway and they leaped out like gazelles and I could hardly get out of the car. [Everyone laughs] Prayer is the absolute conviction that things will go well. Not from the way it looks or anything else, but just your own realization that God is beyond all comprehension and can accomplish anything.
This story has a lengthy introduction announcing the point, which is then reiterated in the coda: human beings have access to divine help through prayer, faith and the realization that "God is beyond all comprehension and can accomplish anything." While the story shows how difficult it is to hold on to "the absolute conviction that things will go well" when one finds oneself in "dire straits"--Liz herself was, she says, "terrified," and so exhausted by the ordeal she "could hardly get out of the car,"--her point is that, despite how bad the situation appeared to be, the fact that she prayed and chanted opened her to the divine help which is "always there."

A final example of this sort of "faith story" is the one she told me about Franz Werfel. I had been asking her what she thought of reports of appearances of the Virgin Mary, for example in places like the shrine at Medjugorje in the former Yugoslavia, and at Lourdes:

I think it's very genuine. I think those things occur in order to reinforce faith. Because, as I say, you get it from people who have it. And I think that wherever people gather they generate that kind of energy that's very nourishing and I think other people visiting there carry it away, so it spreads around. I think it's very helpful. . . .I told you about Franz Werfel. He was escaping from Germany with friends, and they were on
their way to I think Barcelona; they were on the way to take a boat to this country, and his family was still in Germany. And he was an agnostic. And they stopped in Lourdes because--they hadn't made a pilgrimage; it was on their path--and he was sitting on a park bench eating his lunch and saw all these people going, and he said to himself, "If this is true, if it has this power, then I pray or wish or whatever, that I can be united with my family in America." And he said, "If it has this power and I can be united with my family in America and have a home and a job and be free, I will write the story of this place." And he wrote The Song of Bernadette, because a year later he was in Hollywood, with his family, with a good job, plenty of money. [pause] It's there. [dramatic pause] And it responds to challenges.

Liz stated the coda of this story with great feeling, her voice trembling and tears in her eyes. The story again shows that the divine or spiritual realm responds to human requests; that prayers are answered: "It's there. And it responds to challenges." As she had said in another interview, "The divine is always there, always helpful."

These stories help to illustrate Elizabeth Kelly's worldview: that there is a spiritual dimension and that human beings have a relation to it; that it is, in fact, a benevolent influence in human affairs. Such a worldview
inevitably influences behavior, hence Liz also tells stories about individuals whose lives of devotion reflect their faith. In recounting her life history she told me this story:

My mother’s father was one of thirteen children. I don’t know where he was in the thirteen, but I think he was one of the younger ones. Anyway, one of his sisters lived in Chicago, two of his sisters lived in Chicago. One of them worked. She and her husband had I think three or four children. The mother and father both worked and the other sister took care of the children. And they lived on--I’m not sure whether it was the second story or third story. But in those days apartments had porches that served as fire escapes too. And one little boy was very unruly. His name was Lawrence. And they had a roll of linoleum on the back porch. And he would walk around on that railing on the third floor and scare her to death. And he fell, and he pulled the linoleum with him and it landed on his leg. And so he had operation after operation. First the leg was too long. Then it was too short. But finally they got it right. But she did nothing but pray, and when she died, her knees were so calloused from prayer. And somehow or other, that impressed me, and her terrible sense of responsibility.
Although prayers were answered in that "finally they got it right," what seems to be the point here is not so much the theme of answered prayer as in the stories previously cited, which show that a spiritual dimension exists and is responsive to human need, as that of the woman's attitude towards the spiritual dimension, her faith and devotion: "But she did nothing but pray, and when she died her knees were so calloused from prayer. And somehow or other, that impressed me. . . ." Her devotion was evidence of her faith.

In another interview, I was commenting that her message is really not new; that what she says is fairly consistent with what most people who have had a religious upbringing have already been taught, yet it somehow seemed to be more powerful coming from her. She responded thus:

Well, I think it's because--you know we have the four sons and our third son was a Benedictine brother for six years and many times I visited the monastery. And I was always impressed by the peace, the incredible peace. And they were still human beings, I mean, they were political and not even above common thievery, you know. One of the dear brothers in the bookstore--I had such sympathy--he used the money to buy a record collection. Why not, you know, [laughter] why not? which he shared with everybody. No harm done. But anyway, I couldn't
understand; it was the same religion that they had in the church on Sunday but it didn’t feel the same in the church on Sunday as it did in the monastery. And I thought, "Why is it different?" And then I realized that while they were still human beings, with passions and emotions and all that, they lived in a community that was dedicated to truth so that day after day after day, they did what had to be done as an offering, you know, an offering. . . .Well, my son was very anxious for me to meet this one--you know the sisters, in order to have money for their order, in Mexico, they would stay a year or two and then they would go back and others would come and they did, naturally, all the grubby things, the scrubbing and the cleaning that the men, who are holier than thou, you know, cooking and all that, laundry, and so my son was so impressed and so worshipful toward this sister; it wasn’t love; it was recognition of the divine. And so finally after two years I was able to meet her. She was ironing in a basement full of big pipes going all different ways, and yet it seemed to be full of light and there were little tiny shrines here and there and it was the cleanest place; I’ve never been in a cleaner room. And you can imagine, all those pipes, every day having to be done, cleaned. And she was ironing meticulously one of those involved neck things and I said to her--and she was doing it so
lovingly--and I said to her, "Oh, sister, do you like to iron?" And she looked at me with beautiful, clear eyes and this absolutely heavenly smile and she said, "Oh no, I hate it." [We both laugh] And she was not being funny, I mean, she just hated it. But here, in this exquisitely clean basement, with all the pipes and little shrines--[tape ran out here]

There are (at least) two stories here. The first, about the peace of the monastery, seems to be a response to my comment about the power of her message. The question, "Why is her message more powerful than that of organized religions?" is similar to the question that in the story she asked herself: "Why did the monastery communicate a peace that cannot be found in church on Sunday?" The answer is that, in contrast to the parish church, life in a monastery is lived with an attitude of devotion, and this attitude permeates the atmosphere of the place. Liz provides this evaluation in the statement, "Day after day after day, they did what had to be done as an offering."

I inferred that the second story, about the nun, is a specific illustration of such an attitude. Though the tape unfortunately ran out just as Liz was providing the coda that would be her evaluation, I understood, because of what she had said immediately before as well as what I already knew about her attitudes towards daily life, that the nun
who performed so lovingly a task that was odious to her was to be seen as exemplifying a life of devotion. It is this attitude, Liz teaches, that transforms daily life, that sacralizes it. The most menial tasks can transform life if they are performed in a spirit of devotion. I remember, in her talks at Rockford, she would say that the Buddhists call this "maintaining the universe," and the Christians call it "practicing the presence of God."

By implication, then, Liz's teachings draw their power from the spirit in which she, like those in the monastery, lives her life and does her work: as an offering to the divine. Indeed, she commented once that to do the kind of work she does, one has to live "like a monk." I do not think she told these stories to set herself up as leading an exemplary life. To the contrary, Elizabeth Kelly is one of the most humble people I have ever known and she often tells stories about her own failures to "practice what she preaches." Rather, I think she used my observation as an opportunity to teach me about the proper attitude toward life and daily responsibility.

In all of the above stories, Elizabeth Kelly's meaning has been nigh unmistakeable because of the evaluative comments she herself has made in the course of telling them. Liz's use of stories often resembles what Labov has observed in therapeutic interviews, where "the narratives themselves may serve only as a framework for the evaluation" (Labov
I believe Elizabeth Kelly is a gifted storyteller, but that her main interest is in her evaluation, where the healing message may be found. This message provides her listeners with a worldview—in James Hillman's terms a "healing fiction"—through which they may reframe their own difficulties. In discussing stories as therapy, Kirin Narayan writes,

Like the Cuna shaman (and most traditional healers), Swamiji's strategy is also to place individual experience within collective symbolic structures, endowing it with meaning. The stories metaphorically express human dilemmas and, by reaching a resolution within the story, Swamiji supplies listeners with a moral that can be applied in their lives (Narayan 109).

Elizabeth Kelly tells stories primarily as a way of inspiring people, of giving them courage to go on and reassuring them that life has "meaning and purpose" even in the midst of adversity. Her stories function to make people aware of "another reality" that lends beauty and meaning to their daily lives. Having faith, then, is another way of "getting through the day."
Notes

1. For the text of a reading, see the following chapter. For the text of a talk Elizabeth Kelly gave at Rockford Chapel see Appendix B.

2. Richard Bauman explains, "the term 'performance' has been used to convey a dual sense of artistic action--the doing of folklore--and artistic event--the performance situation, involving performer, art form, audience and setting." There has been a "fundamental reorientation," he writes, "from folklore as materials to folklore as communication" (Bauman 4).

3. For examples in addition to those discussed in this chapter, see Appendix C.

4. See Appendix A for a sampling of other stories Elizabeth Kelly has told.

5. This story can be found in Ken Keyes, The Hundredth Monkey. It is recounted in Sonia Johnson's Going Out of Our Minds: The Metaphysics of Liberation as an example of morphogenesis. Johnson adds, in a note, "The veracity of this story has recently been disputed" (Johnson 161).

6. Camp Chesterfield, located in Chesterfield, Indiana, is managed by the Indiana Association of Spiritualists. Their literature describes it as "a spiritual center of light and healing, dedicated to the teaching and demonstration of the continuity of life and to the holistic concept of man."

7. For the complete text of the talk in which this story was told, see Appendix B. The story appears on pages 271-272.

8. See Appendix A.
CHAPTER 5
ELIZABETH KELLY AND WOMEN'S HEALING

RR: Liz, do you think of yourself as a guru?
EK: No, darling. (laughs) No. I think of myself as an old woman who has learned certain things in a very difficult way, but they're so simple and so easily stated and grasped that if you hear them often enough they do transform life, because they make it so much easier. It's really like a lot of good recipes, you know, and you can cook any which way, but if you have a really good recipe, you're pretty well sure to turn out something that's pretty good.

What to call Elizabeth Kelly--guru, wisewoman, spiritual teacher, psychic, counsellor, reader/advisor--has been something of a dilemma. She refers to herself as a psychic and her business card describes what she does as counselling. But in addition to reading Tarot cards, counselling and teaching, she also conducts "healing groups" and at times performs healing rituals which she calls "recharging people's energy." Her healing work is primarily
in the dimension of the spiritual and psychological. Indeed, she commented to me recently, "Medicine is something I haven't the least interest in," though she does believe that attending to the ills of the spirit has healing effects on the physical being as well. In the broadest sense, then, Elizabeth Kelly could be called a healer in that people who are troubled, usually emotionally, spiritually or psychologically and also occasionally physically, come to her for help, support, advice, guidance and prayer.

Elizabeth Kelly is an informal healer. According to Carolyn Nordstrom, "Informal healing lacks codified documentation and its practitioners are unlicensed and unregulated" (Nordstrom 56). She functions outside the professional healing systems as well as outside any organized religious institution. However, unlike many traditional healers who have been studied by folklorists and anthropologists, for example, Native American medicine women, Hispanic curanderas, or African American conjure women, Elizabeth Kelly, a white middle-class woman of Protestant origins, cannot be easily placed within any particular ethnic tradition or culture either. Pat Ellis Taylor explains that there is what she calls an "Anglo folk healing tradition," but that it "has not been studied and analyzed as definitively as have the folk healing traditions of other cultures" (Taylor 105-106). She writes,
This has not been the fault so much of folklorists and researchers as it is a symptom of the disrepute and lack of respect generally accorded in our culture to the tradition itself. This has been particularly true of those aspects of folk healing associated with religious or psychic principles, many of which are rooted in antiquity and were originally channeled into Christianity. . . . As a result of [a] powerful combination of censure from both church and medical institutions, the Anglo community has provided little encouragement to its folk healers (Taylor 106-107).

The difficulty over the issue of what to call Elizabeth Kelly is created in part, as Taylor suggests, by centuries-old cultural prejudices and negative stereotypes. Liz was painfully aware of these stereotypes, many of them trivializing, in the early years of her career:

EK: In the beginning I did see a wider range of people, but as I have changed my prices, primarily because I couldn’t read for that many people in a day, I would have--well, I only charged five dollars, you know.
RR: Five dollars? And so you had people flocking in?
EK: Oh, yeah; but I realized that some people just would go to Yellow Springs for lunch and then go to--you know, they heard about that woman that [reads
cards] and they’d go and see her. I do think that the people I read for, I do think it changed their attitude toward people who do that.

RR: I’m sure it did; you’re not what they expect.

EK: Well, (laughter) this one woman said to me one day, she said--someone had told her about me--she called up and she said, "Do you have a sign out in your front yard?" I just loved it. I said, "No, no, you’ll have to find your way."

RR: (laughter) You should have a neon sign in your window.

EK: Yeah, yeah. That was so funny. And then I realized very often people would come, in the beginning people would come see me and they’d think, "Well, that’s so simple, I’m gonna go home and do this myself."

RR: They’d start reading themselves?

EK: Mmmhmm. Yeah, why not? All you do is get a deck of cards. You know, I mean they didn’t have any idea, no idea. And, see, it’s all energy. And actually it can be very destructive. If you do this, you really have to live like a monk.

Without any understanding of the years of preparation that preceded Elizabeth Kelly’s embarking upon this career, or of the spiritual discipline it requires, people would see
a reading as an afternoon's entertainment, or as a hobby they could pick up themselves after one exposure. The woman looking for the sign obviously expected a fortune-teller with a crystal ball.

Because of these images in the popular culture, Liz herself feels somewhat uncomfortable with the term "psychic": "I don't like psychics for some reason," she says. "I have an aversion. I know it's projection. I think it's being seen as psychic by people who really don't know what [it involves], who have odd ideas. My conviction is that everybody's psychic. Some people are more conscious of it." In fact, our culture does not have an easily identified or easily accepted social role for people who perform the many functions Elizabeth Kelly does, even though, judging by her large clientele, the need for those who are willing to fulfill such roles is great. As Margery Fox remarks, "Women have traditionally been the soothsayers, fortune-tellers, astrologists and clairvoyants of western society, but these roles are not highly valued and indispensable in the West. . . " (Fox 99).

Perhaps Elizabeth Kelly's clearest lineage is with the wisewomen of old known as witches, most of whom were midwives and healers who, from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries, were persecuted in Europe (Ehrenreich and English 7-8). Elizabeth Kelly revealed some identification with this tradition when she told me the
In one past life--I met this woman in Springfield, a psychic. She's dead now, but she was very remarkable. And the minute I saw her I knew we had been burned at the stake together. But she had been burned three times; I only got burned once. She hated, hated reading cards. But she would do it. And she would come down here and we'd have a chat and everything, and she always liked me to read for her and I would read for her and then she would read for me. And I never paid any attention to it because it was all these dire forebodings and--everything happened; everything happened. But I just didn't want to get into it. But she was right every time. And I would say, "Oh no, I don't think so." And she would say, "Mark my word; mark my word." But she, like everyone else, would hope for the best. Yes, she was very remarkable.

Elizabeth Kelly is not in any way affiliated with contemporary witchcraft but she recognizes that, as she said one day, "You know, there are people who think I'm a witch and work with Satan."

Elizabeth Kelly can also be seen to be carrying on the tradition of women preachers of the nineteenth century, a time when, according to Barbara Welter, religion was
becoming "feminized" (Welter 83), and when religious movements like Christian Science and Unity were founded and led by women. In these churches women extended their domestic skills of care, nurture and moral guidance into the public sphere and healing was often at the center of their ministries. Elizabeth Kelly was exposed to both of these denominations when she was young.

And she is clearly linked with the contemporary New Age movement, with its roots in the Occult tradition and in Eastern religions. Elizabeth Kelly studied Metaphysics in England with Dr. Douglas Baker, and from the time of her youth was influenced by Self Realization Fellowship, founded by Paramahansa Yogananda. She learned important healing methods from both of these influences.

The techniques Elizabeth Kelly uses, such as Tarot cards, the I Ching, the Viking Runes, healing circles, dream analysis, meditation, the laying on of hands, and a vision of life in which all things are part of the one, are drawn from many different traditions which reflect her own eclectic spiritual history and unique style. I am less interested in teasing out the various traditions upon which she draws, however, than in the thread of women's healing running through all of them and in what Liz as a woman healer, a term I will settle on for the purposes of this discussion, shares with them.

As Jean Achterberg has shown in her panoramic history
Woman as Healer, Western culture has attempted to exclude women from the officially sanctioned healing systems in anything more than supportive roles, as well as rejected many methods of healing which women have known and practiced since ancient times. "Women have always been healers," she explains.

Cultural myths from around the world describe a time when only women knew the secrets of life and death, and therefore they alone could practice the magical art of healing. In crises and calamity, or so some of the stories go, women's revered position as keepers of the sacred wisdom was deliberately and forcibly wrested away from them. At other places, in other eras, women's legal right to practice the healing vocations was gradually eroded by changing mores and religious dogma (Achterberg 1).

Nevertheless, women like Elizabeth Kelly have continued to function as healers on the periphery of the culture:

Despite all odds, women have continued to this day to practice the old healing ways. Throughout Europe and America, contemporary wise women have maintained many of the ancient symbols, myths, health practices and rituals. . . . Other practitioners have focused on
single healing approaches, like midwifery, herbalism, healing circles, or laying on of hands, modes which were aspects of prepatriarchal life (Glendinning 284).

Although there is no monolithic women's healing tradition—women's healing practices of course differ according to historical period, race, class and ethnicity—Achterberg argues that women healers do share certain traits that stand in contrast to institutionalized health care and religious practices: they attend to mind, body and spirit as a whole, rather than focus on one to the exclusion of the others; they incorporate nurturing and caring into their ministrations, valuing empathy and relationship with the client or patient as much as or more than anything the healer does; they tend to function empirically, using their own experience as a basis of their practice rather than relying on abstract theory or external authority; they feel an obligation not only to individuals but also to communities and to the earth itself, seeing nature as a source of healing; they see themselves as functioning within "sacred space" (Achterberg 1-5). Elizabeth Kelly shares these characteristics with women healers of the past and present.

Carol Shepherd McClain writes, in Women as Healers, "The ethnographic evidence thus far indicates that most informal healing is accomplished by women in domestic
contexts. Its symbolic associations in these instances become intertwined with other female symbols" (McClain, 8). Elizabeth Kelly began her healing career in the "domestic context" of visiting with a neighbor in her own home and trying to help her pull out of a depression: "Actually it was just conversation," she explained, "anything that could divert the mind or, like women talk, you know, just about whatever’s going on; nothing highly significant." This "women’s talk," often so trivialized by the culture, was the vehicle by which Liz helped her friend along to greater mental health and discovered her calling.

Betthina Aptheker clarifies the "domestic context" of many women’s lives:

Women’s everyday lives are often fragmented and dispersed, caught up short between a job, dinner, and the laundry. They are often episodic. . . . Women are continually interrupted. Projects, especially their own, are put aside to be completed on another day or in another year. In the course of a day, a week, women carry the threads of many tasks in their hands at the same time. . . . Some of these things also happen to men, but not all of them, and they don’t happen in the same ways because most men in the United States are not ultimately responsible for maintaining personal relationships and networks. They are not responsible
for emotional work. They are not primarily responsible for the children, the elders, the relatives, the holidays, the cooking, the cleaning, the shopping, the mending, the laundry. Their position as men, even as working-class men and men of color, gives them access to more resources and status relative to the women and families of their communities because the society institutionalizes a system of male domination (Aptheker 39).

Aptheker argues that these facts, what she calls "the dailiness of women's lives," shape a way of seeing and coping with life. "By the dailiness of women's lives," she explains, "I mean the patterns women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labors and in the context of their subordinated status to men." Together, these constitute a "women's standpoint" (Aptheker 39), a perspective that can also be seen to shape the way Liz defines and carries out the healing role.

To be sure, Elizabeth Kelly has developed beyond the domestic context described above. As an elder, she is no longer tied down to many of the domestic tasks Aptheker describes. Since her children have left home she has had the freedom to cultivate many interests, to read, paint, write poetry and keep well-informed about politics and public affairs, as well as to serve the community through
her role as spiritual teacher and healer. While much of her healing work is conducted within her home, she also goes outside her home to speak and over the years she has achieved a public identity that is recognized not only by her many clients but also by the professional mental health community. She is a member of the Menninger Foundation and reads widely in the field of psychology and psychotherapy. Even without formal degrees or licences, her work with people is grounded in an understanding of these disciplines.

As the description of herself that begins this chapter illustrates, however, Liz suggests that the way she sees her role as spiritual guide and healer has also been shaped, at least in part, by the traditional female roles of homemaker, mother and friend that she has occupied throughout her life. As she has prepared food for her family and nurtured them, she now nurtures others with the spiritual teachings which, like recipes, instruct them in the spiritual life and greater psychological well-being. These "female symbols," the daily tasks of homemaking and mothering, inform the ways that Liz speaks of herself and her work; they inform her counselling techniques, her public discourse, and her basic vision of life.

Barbara Myerhoff, summarizing Sherry B. Ortner's important essay, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?," writes,
It is often said that the contingent nature of woman’s work makes it intrinsically less satisfying, and that this is why it is consistently and permanently devalued by societies all over the world. Women are identified as responsible for the work of "nature," while "culture," it is said, is officially the work of men. Many writers feel that women concur with men in viewing cultural projects as more valuable an activity than their "natural" enterprises. A woman’s projects are described as transient, pure process compared with the lasting, transforming products of men’s work. Her tasks are mundane, concrete; his are abstract, elevated; hers involve subjectivity, personalism, and particularism; his are objective, general, lofty, and so on (Myerhoff 267-8).

In contrast, it is the assumption of this study that "women’s work" and the "women’s standpoint" defined above may be seen as strengths, especially in the field of healing. Myerhoff argues that women themselves also believe in the value of their work:

"... there is a set of understandings shared among women, concerning the meaning and value of their
conventional functions. These are often communicated but in a form not always easy to recognize. . . . These understandings are a kind of underground culture, quietly transmitted in situations, no less essential than the starkly evident, grandiose cultural productions we customarily attend (Myerhoff 267-8).

In order to further our understanding of women's contributions to the healing arts it is important to articulate and make visible the ways that this standpoint informs women's healing work, even while acknowledging that any given woman healer may not be limited to that standpoint. The richness that Elizabeth Kelly offers to people who seek her help derives, I believe, from the ways she has combined what she has learned as a woman coping with life in a patriarchal society--those understandings Myerhoff refers to as a kind of "underground culture"--with her individual artistic, intellectual and spiritual interests and development. Susan Sered writes,

The feminist scholarship of the last two decades has offered critiques of almost every aspect of society; countless books and articles describing women's oppression in economic, political, medical, social, familial, legal, religious, and academic institutions have carefully and convincingly analyzed the ways in
which patriarchal culture circumscribes women’s lives. Less is known about the strategies that women have used to circumvent patriarchal institutions, the techniques women have created for making their own lives meaningful within androcentric culture... (Sered 6).

These understandings and strategies are what I attempt to elucidate here.

Liz’s approach to healing and spirituality may be seen as an example of the "dailiness of women’s lives" in the emphasis she places on practicality. While she begins each reading and most of her public talks with the lofty statement, "The universe exists within God, like an egg within a shell, and there is literally nothing separate in the universe," she immediately follows this statement with an explanation of "what it means in daily life." She wanted to call her first published collection of talks How To Get Through the Day, while her editor wanted to give it the more abstract title Spiritual Journey:

When he said spiritual journey, you know, it just sounded off on cloud nine and actually the whole problem is to get through the day, you know, never mind cloud nine. (laughter) That’s what it’s all about. Yes, the greatest evidence of our awareness of God or the divine energy or the Buddha within or whatever in
the world you want to call it is a willingness to do
our best every day, whatever we think that is. Day
after day, no vacation, no time off, just do it, do it
,do it, do it. Remember, if we were perfect we
wouldn’t be here.

In Spiritual Journey, she says, "What good does it do if you
can walk on water? First learn to live through the day"
(Kelly 17).

"Getting through the day" means not only accomplishing
one’s many tasks, obligations and duties, but doing so
without losing one’s connection to the Source--to God,
Reality, the Self, one’s soul--whatever one wants to call
the Ultimate. Simone de Beauvoir talked in The Second Sex
about women’s lack of liberty arising from being caught in
immanence; of being denied the opportunity for
transcendence. In the development of her own spiritual life
and in her service to others, Elizabeth Kelly has found a
way to consecrate that immanence or dailiness; a way to find
meaning in it and hence, transcendence. As she says in some
recent unpublished writings, "I think of each day as a
complete offering to the Divine." This attitude toward life
is of course basic to many religions. Christians speak of
"practicing the presence of God"; Eastern religions of
"skillful means" and of karma yoga or the yoga of action.
But it is also an attitude particularly suited to female destinies, which are so often more like that of the Biblical Martha, who tended the kitchen, than that of Mary, who could devote her life to contemplation. The "focus on the practical...comes out of the particularity of women's labors and consciousness. This is the meaning of daily life" (Aptheker 74).

A philosophy of "getting through the day" can also be understood as a strategy of survival which is an important value of Elizabeth Kelly's, coming as she did out of an oppressive childhood and confinement within the traditional female role most of her life. As she says, again in Spiritual Journey, "Sometimes the most practical goal you can have is to get through the day. If you can get through the day, you can survive" (Kelly 12). "The great triumph, as I have told you, is to survive. It is no great thing to die. Anybody can die. It is better to live. That is the challenge. And this is something that took me years, years, years to learn" (Kelly, 13).

Much of Liz's energy, then, goes into helping people "get through the day," as she has learned to. "I have this little class," she told me during one interview. "Just three people. I'm trying to find out if I can significantly help people in their daily life, so there's not so much anxiety and fear and to help overcome grief." Because her orientation is to the daily, she is responsive to whatever
is going on at the time. "I sort of take their temperature and see where the greatest need is at the moment, you know." Indeed, Liz does a great deal of crisis intervention. Of one man who dropped by while I was interviewing in June of 1989, she said,

I really should have spent more time with him, but I just . . . I told him, I gave him that wonderful chant and I told him that his problems were within and--(laughs) it's kind of like emergency treatment. You know, do it all and pack 'em out. It will help him enormously. You can't focus in on whether they're really going to do it or if they realize what you're trying to do. You have to just focus on trying to be helpful and that's all you can do. And everybody needs something, you know. Well, they wouldn't come here if they didn't need something. (laughs) My little emergency room.

Liz thinks of herself as having "a ragbag full of stuff," a "handy-dandy first aid kit. Something will work," she says. Explaining her work further in a later interview, she said,

I have a very good book on short term [therapy]--see that's where I consider--I have to do it right then because I might not see them again. And I don't have
the—they don’t go, as they would to a psychiatrist or to a psychologist, where they recognize that more has to be done. Actually, it’s insight into their own behavior. Because psychologists say to recognize is to relieve. The moment they recognize a pattern they’ll never repeat it. And it’ll take awhile for all the changes to take place, but that intervention is what matters. And that is my effort. And I’m very trusting about it. I don’t ever sit down with the idea that I’m going to be helpful or people--I just pray and do what I can. And I must say I’m always more dumbfounded than anybody else when everything works. But I have a conviction that it will work, but I never feel that way at the moment. I always am very conscious of trying to do all I can. My sincerity of effort is all I can do.

Interestingly, even in the professional health-care system, it is women primarily who do this kind of work. Mary Catherine Bateson quotes Ellen Bassuk, a physician and psychiatrist:

There are certain jobs in big-time teaching hospitals that are almost reserved for women, because in the psychiatric hierarchy they are seen as less desirable than running the inpatient or outpatient units where the psychotherapy goes on. Crisis intervention is not
valued in the same way as psychotherapy. In our department, the people who had these jobs were usually women, and women never had those other jobs, the core jobs. The ER is the most dangerous and most service-oriented department in psychiatry. It’s open twenty-four hours a day and if someone comes in you’re up, you’ve got to move fast. It’s action-oriented. .

(Bateson 22).

Bateson speaks of women’s "heritage" of "responsiveness and interruptibility" (Bateson 179). As Tillie Olsen has said, "Children need one now" (Olsen 18). Similarly, Liz said, explaining how she came to her work through helping her neighbor: "And that helped to convince me, although everything else had too, that there just weren’t enough psychiatrists and psychologists to go around and people needed a great deal of help and they needed it right then and there and not next week or, you know, when you felt like it." Thus, Liz responds to need as it arises on a daily basis, as women always have, but extends this domestic role into a public one, serving those outside the family.

Liz frequently describes spiritual growth in domestic metaphors:

I don’t believe in guilt at all. It’s like rust; it doesn’t do anything. No, I believe in correcting your
behavior; making an effort to continuously do more. I think that's what you do in a home, you know; little by little you keep making it better and better. I don't think it's like going out and buying everything. I think it's just improving what's there.

In a later interview she said, "I think as we learn, it's very much like keeping house; more things come in; then you have to get rid of stuff. Otherwise you can't walk through the place." Her own work she frequently describes as an effort "to make things better."

Gardening becomes a metaphor for spiritual practice:

It's [the planet] not something that's going to last forever and ever and ever. But you can do each day what you can do, you know. And dear Bob, he planted eight rose bushes; and our peonies bloomed this year, thank God, and the iris; very beautiful. And we're going to have some poppies next year. We just do what we can. You can't do any more.

In another interview:

See, the dogwood tree--you don't know what I went through to get the dogwood tree, to get it planted, but it's there. And spring after spring, it will be there.
[You don’t know] what I went through to get a tree planted when we lived over in Springfield. And my children said—and it did, it looked like a broomstick with twigs on it and they laughed and laughed and made such fun of it. And years later, I went back and it was springtime and here was this magnificent cherry, weeping willow cherry. It enhanced the whole neighborhood. And this magnolia blooming, and I thought, if I never did another thing, you know, that’s enough. Because it makes it very beautiful.

In both of these examples, planting flowers and trees, creating beauty, symbolize doing one’s best to "make things better"; doing what one can, within one’s own limitations, which for many women are the limitations of the domestic sphere, to improve life. These actions also represent achievements one may take personal pride in. As she says above, "If I never did another thing, that’s enough." The following comments seem to be made in a similar spirit:

In the front, you see, the maples make shade that things can’t grow in, so you can’t have grass, so where the shadows are, all this stuff [is] coming up. It doesn’t make a whole lot of landscape sense. But for me it’s a little individual triumph that even there,
these little things could grow. Grass wouldn't grow there; weeds have a hard time. But this stuff will come up. So it's little personal triumphs.

In her study of women ministers, Elaine J. Lawless notes that, despite differences in denomination, all advocate "a kind of ministry that would allow for and encourage the development of each parishioner toward spiritual growth and seeking full potential" (Lawless 1993, 277), their preaching and counselling focusing on the themes of "wholeness and well being" (Lawless 1993, 282). Elizabeth Kelly is similarly devoted to fostering growth, not only in nature but also in those who seek her help. "My concern," she once said, "was what allowed people to grow and become more." Indeed, metaphors of growth are woven throughout her discourse. In discussing this project, she said,

I think women should be encouraged to realize that life can be more. And the only way to deal with a problem is to outgrow it, absorb it --otherwise it just keeps reshaping in different places. . . . The value of all this is to show people that difficulties are not overwhelming; that they're just something to cope with. . . . Everybody can outlive these things and they are not something to be ruined by but to grow from and
learn.

One client sent her a note with a picture of a basket on the front. Inside, she wrote,

I came to you an empty basket. Now I'm a sapling trying to brave out its first winter. Thank you for watering and fertilizing me and putting me out in the sunshine. I never had nurturing before, not from my mother nor father nor husband. They were too needy themselves.

It is in her nurturing of people that female symbols are most striking, especially the symbol of the mother. Indeed, much of what Liz does with her clients resembles what a mother does for her child, placing her within a tradition of female healers. "Female images that appear most often in the anthropology of curing, . . . , are those of women as nurturers and mediators. As nurturers, healers protect, comfort and guide patients to restored health in the same way that mothers care for their children" (McClain, 73). William Wedenoja notes,

There is a close correspondence between the personal qualities of effective healers and women, and it seems to be due to strong similarities between the roles of
healing and mothering. According to Kakar (1982, 59), many psychotherapists claim that "the 'feminine' powers of nurturance, warmth, concern, intuitive understanding, and relatedness . . . are essential in every healing encounter and for the success of the healing process (Wedenoja, 94-95)."

Although Liz speaks of her clients primarily as "friends" or "students," in the interviews she often invoked the image of the mother in descriptions of herself and her work. For example, in telling me how she tried to help a woman who had been suicidal she said,

EK: Well, when a little child is hurt or despondent or whatever, and the mother says, "It will be better, you know, know that we have to endure things and it will be better and not be discouraged and you can do better and not to worry, everybody loves you, God loves you, father loves you, mother loves you, it will be all right"--it's the same thing. There isn't any new message.

RR: We still need it, even though we're grown up.

EK: Of course. We always need it. We always need it. When we get to the point where we don't need it, we're dead. And then we're off in someplace else anyway.
Her technique is thus to comfort, reassure and encourage so that problems may be seen in a different light. "Really, all they had to know was that somebody was hearing them and that there were choices; nothing was inevitable. . . .What people need is a sense of security and being recognized, being known." That sense of security then leads to spiritual growth: "When you know you’re loved and understood and cared for, you don’t have to be critical of other people. You can accept that they’re doing their best, whatever that is." On another occasion, commenting further on the relationship between emotional security and spiritual growth, she said:

I think everyone is benefitted by having someone pay attention to them. And this is why I don’t think it spoils little children for mothers to hover and supply that awareness, because it gives the child so much confidence that as they grow up and they find out that other people aren’t like that they recognize their own benefits and blessings and are able to be nourishing to others in the way that they were nourished. And I think people who have been deprived of that, if they come in contact with a spiritual leader or, as I did with Paramahansa Yogananda, or if they come in contact with a therapist who is really devoted.
Indeed, the conviction that one is "loved, understood and cared for" comes first and foremost from the contact with Liz herself, who communicates that this is true by her warmth and concern, by attentive listening and the imparting of spiritual wisdom, as well as by literally giving people things. When I asked if the woman who was suicidal had responded to her help she said,

I think so. Well, just to be sure, I gave her--(laughs)--when they're that bad, sometimes they're so bad that only something tangible will work. All the conversation--actually, the conversation focusses into something tangible. And that was one of those--I'm so fond of those, and every time I get them I cherish them and love them and--but then I have to part with them. (laughs) But don't worry, something will come back, and if it doesn't it's still all right. But anyway, one of those, a smaller silver dollar, but it had been coated with gold. Very beautiful. But these things come and you treasure them and love them and then you give them where they will do the most good. Not just off into the blue but with purpose, because then you're participating. And you can't think, "Oh, this is all mine; I'm not going to give any away." No. Live. Live. Live. Because it's all the same thing.
Here--here--all one. All one. . . . Because when people get to that state verbalizing is not going to do much. And they have to have something that's so overpowering that forces the mind into another place. Because the reason she is where she is is that she feels that she's been very badly treated and people are not very good and all this and that, and if she's absolutely confronted with generosity and love and kindness, what happens is that she has to see things differently. And anytime people change their mind, the future is transformed. The mind is--it's like a prison. . . . Never be discouraged. Know things will go well.

Of another client she said,

I always try to give him something because he's had such a history of deprivation that just giving him little things makes him feel [more secure]. I told you I wrote that thing up for The Quest magazine--I have a copy--so I gave him a copy of that; and a friend gave me a whole lot of incense and so I gave him some incense, and, just little things that he can take in his hand, you know. It's an effort to overcome that terrible feeling of deprivation.
In the counsel Liz gives people, she must often sugar-coat a bitter pill, yet at the same time respect and encourage independence:

It's kind of like being a surrogate mother, you know, and so consequently you have to always consider what is really the best thing. It isn't always the thing they like the most, you know. It's kind of like giving medicine. You have to accent how marvelous it's going to be if they do this and not how difficult it is to do, you know. Most of all, you have to convince them that they're doing it. You know, the Chinese say, "Of a great teacher the people will say we did it all ourselves." If they think it's somebody else doing it, it has no value. It's terribly important that they make up their own minds and very often they want to do whatever they want to do and it's very important that they do that, even if the other thing would be better. It's not their conviction . . . . You cannot interfere with lives. If you could it would be such a blessing. But they're like people on a roller coaster and you just have to let them . . . ride it out. But you have to keep reassuring them that everything will go well and you have to make a big effort to be there when they get to the end, because they do, and it's a necessary and vital experience for their life--to understand
life, you know.

As the "surrogate mother" she is, then, she not only gives love and nurturing but also fosters learning.

How much her techniques resemble those of a mother with a frightened or upset child was driven home to me quite dramatically when I taped one of her talks at Rockford Chapel in June of 1990. On this summer evening a young mother came, along with her two small children. The baby was contented, but the three-year-old cried and created a general disturbance. Liz, however, welcomed the child and responded lovingly to him, periodically interrupting her remarks to comfort him:

Well, darling. How are you? Come on in, sweetheart. Come on, precious darling. Here, sweetheart, go get a chair. It will be all right. [The child continues to cry.] He'll be all right. Of course, darling, of course. It's all right, sweetheart. Yes, it's fine; it's just fine. I think the most important thing is never to be discouraged, and to know things will go well. [The child continues to cry.] It will be all right; it will be all right. [The child's mother hands him some beads from her purse and this distracts him momentarily.] That's why mothers have big bags. (laughter) The Lord has a big bag too.
She comforts this child in ways similar to those she uses to comfort anyone who comes to her in pain: with expressions of love, understanding and reassurance. And rather than be disturbed or thrown off track by the child’s crying, she weaves the event into her discourse, using it as a metaphor for the "maternal" nature of God: "The Lord has a big bag too," she says. Later in the talk she uses the incident again to make a similar point: "Just realize that you’re loved and understood and cared for and you can be like the little baby in the basket and just be there, or you can say, ‘I don’t like it, I don’t like it, I don’t like it.’"

In addition to demonstrating her skill at using what is available at the moment, of improvising, in order to persuade her listeners, this incident also illustrates the qualities that Liz attributes to the divine, which are those of a loving mother, as well as those she herself embodies. What Liz seeks to evoke in people is the sense of being secure in the love of a nurturing presence in the hopes that they will gain access to the nurturing presence of God. "My purpose," she said in August of 1990, "is to help people realize...that they are connected to a source, and realizing that connection is transforming." In this sense Liz reflects the other image of women that McClain says appears in the anthropology of curing, that of mediator:
As mediators, healers cross symbolic boundaries, particularly those separating the human world from that of spirits or ancestors, and intervene in the latter on behalf of their patients or clients. In yet another sense, healers mediate between forces that cause illness when the body experiences imbalance: hot or cold, excess emotion like fright or anger, harmful natural qualities like the wind or the magnetism associated with eclipses, and so forth (McClain 73).

In her description of her healing methods that follows, Elizabeth Kelly functions as a mediator in the sense that she becomes the conduit for the "divine energy of the universe," that "source" she speaks of above. In her view, illness and suffering come from separation from that source. Her function is to reconnect people to it:

EK: Oh, I do that, I kind of recharge people's energy.
RR: How do you do that?
EK: Well, actually, what you do is impose an energy pattern into the pattern they already have. You alter the vibrations in the person's body. I usually have them sit there and face that little altar--on the buffet--they sit in that chair, see. And usually I have them take off their shoes and their glasses, if they're flexible enough to do that. If they're not
very flexible, I just have them take off their glasses. You put your right hand on their forehead right above the nose and your left hand in the back of the head--there's a kind of knobby thing back there, and it's in between; there's two knobs and then there's a knob underneath and you get right in there and then I concentrate on the divine energy in the universe. You focus your energy into knowing that things will go well and that the universe is benign, that we're loved and understood and cared for beyond comprehension; and that will take away a headache, by the way, too. . . . Where people are at a distance, and perhaps you've never even seen them or known them, you can relate to them; you relate to them through whoever asks for prayers, a friend or acquaintance, and through that--it's really just matter, energy and vibration and where the vibration can move along the pattern of energy and the material to wherever the healing is desired, the quicker it can be accomplished.
RR: How does that happen?
EK: Well, you translate the vibration back into the energy and that energy back into the material, sort of like making steam into ice.
RR: It's all mental projection?
EK: Yes, yes, yes. It's really just realization that you can reach the person in a very intimate way, that
it isn't some nebulous,
I-can't-imagine-who-it-is-out-there- sort of thing.
But however you can intensely relate to that person and
see that energy as perfect and as expressing that
perfection and as overcoming the delusion of--whatever.
RR: So you partly visualize?
EK: I don't think it's so much visualization as
realization of unity. Unity. Unity. That no matter
how far away or how unknown it's part of us.

Her own intense realization of this unity forges the link
between the client and the "divine energy of the universe,"
and thus effects healing. The altar, with its pictures of
holy men like Paramahansa Yogananda and the Dalai Lama,
symbolizes the presence of these spirits who aid in the
healing. These presences were also invoked in the healing
described in Chapter 1: "I thought of Babaji and his
wonderful sister, and of course Kuan Yin is always in my
heart, and Paramahansa Yogananda and Swamiji Yuketswar; I
just thought of all of them." Her own connection with them,
and symbolically with that divine energy, gets transferred
to the client, who is brought out of the isolation and
estrangement of her or his suffering and into connection
with a larger, nurturing source. According to Jerome Frank,
this approach is characteristic of nonmedical healing:
"Those operating in a religious context. . . see themselves
as bringing supernatural forces to bear on the patient, with
the healer acting primarily as a conduit for them" (Frank
47).

The vision of life that Liz tries to instill is one of
unity, of the interconnectedness of all things. This
vision, like the other aspects of her work I have been
discussing, also uses female symbols, especially in her
oft-repeated statement at the beginning of readings and
lectures: "The universe exists within God, like an egg
within a shell." Barbara G. Walker, in The Women’s
Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets identifies the egg as the
"mystical symbol of the Creatress, whose World Egg contained
the universe in embryo" (Walker 270). Thus the image is
rooted in ancient myths of God as the Great Mother.
Although Liz has never, at least not directly, referred to
God as female, she has been profoundly influenced by
Hinduism, as well as other Eastern religions, which worship
God, among other manifestations, in the aspect of the Divine
Mother. During one interview she pointed out a figure of
Kuan Yin, standing on her buffet next to the table where she
does readings and healings. "She’s the oldest goddess in
the universe," she said. "The goddess of mercy." She
told me her son had given her this statue, and that she had
been "at her feet" ever since. On another occasion she
explained that she had devoted her home to Kuan Yin, so that
when people entered they would feel compassion. "It’s her
shrine, really," she said. Thus in embodying within herself and her environment the qualities of love and compassion, and in using nurturing imagery to describe the divine and its relation to the human, she evokes a benevolent, all-encompassing and nurturing divine presence.

When Elizabeth Kelly does readings and healings, her home is in a sense transformed into a public space. When one walks into the foyer, for example, one sees a table on which can be found business cards of others offering services in the area, literature about spiritual retreats and conferences and images of holy persons, as well as greeting cards from relatives and friends. For years a small card bearing just the word "Goodwill" had a prominent place in this display. The living room is a waiting room for those who have arrived before a previous reading has been completed. The dining room, where Liz sits at the head of a table laden with artifacts, is her work space, lined with books, paintings and plants. Behind her is a tape player which provides music to accompany the readings, and on her table are a glass of water and incense. The client sits to her right. Paper and pencil are within easy reach, as well as additional literature, announcements about her monthly dream group and copies of Spiritual Journey. The buffet, which the client faces, has become an altar bearing a statue of Kuan Yin and images of the Dalai Lama and of
Paramahansa Yogananda, as well as photographs of friends and loved ones. One has entered a sacred space, a space where the domestic and the public interpenetrate.

The Tarot reading is the context in which much of Elizabeth Kelly's nurturing and instruction are given. The following is the text of a reading Elizabeth Kelly did for me on June 16, 1990. It illustrates many of the points I have made above on her teaching and healing techniques.

EK: The most important thing is just to realize that the universe exists within God like an egg in a shell, that there is literally nothing separate in the universe. The fantasy of being separate is what the Hindus call maya, desire, and the Christians call evil. It means in daily life that anything we do where we feel separate, alone, deprived, cut off, will cause suffering and anguish. And anything we do with a sense of unity, with others, for others, because of others, will go well, because it's a realization of truth. We don't need a new religion; we need a new awareness of truth. After the Holocaust and the second World War and the Korean War and the Vietnam War, people have a terrible sense of insecurity. The only security in this life is our capacity to endure whatever happens.

Many people think if they live in a certain place, or this person or that person loves them, or they have

228
enough money in the bank, then they’ll be secure. But that attitude is giving to a person or a place or to something else what really belongs to God. And how we relate to that transforms our daily life.

The Buddhists, of course, don’t believe in a God. They believe the universe is run by laws. But they believe that we have gods and goddesses within us, which are really just a way of describing emotions. And I think it’s very helpful to recognize that these can be protective or destructive. It’s immaterial to the god, to that energy. It’s our interpretation; that is where we have free will. (taps the table)

I don’t think we have control over what happens. But I think we have complete control over our response. And I think a great deal of what happens to us is related to our response. And I think that recognizing in others forms of behavior, and having an awareness of that—I think where we see things in other people and condemn them, we will inevitably have to experience that. Not out of punishment, but to develop greater realization. I think all of this is concerned with realization. And I think realizing that somehow or other we’re part of it all and that it is going forward and that we are loved and understood and cared for beyond comprehension, is the great truth.

I think we’re part of something that we cannot
comprehend. I think it's like hands are part of the body. I don't think they have the comprehension the way the mind does. But they're very sensitive, and what would you take for your hands? How dear are they? That is how dear we are to the divine. We're loved and understood and cared for beyond all comprehension. Because I think in a true sense we are God's hands. And I think we're here to do what we can.

I think it is vital to do what needs to be done. You know in that marvelous book, *What We May Be*, he says enlightenment without mastery is useless. It doesn't matter how enlightened people are if they cannot maintain a peaceful, loving atmosphere, or create some kind of beauty where they are. It isn't helpful. I think we're here to nourish one another. And I think it's very nourishing to be encouraging. I think it is most absolutely vital to be truthful. And I do believe that spiritual enlightenment begins with virtue. I don't think that's the aim. I think you have to start with what you consider to be a virtuous life. And I think a virtuous life is what is appropriate, you know, appropriate behavior. There's appropriate speech, appropriate dress.

Years ago, you know, I told Bob that if things were really perfect you didn't notice them. That was a terrible mistake. (laughter) He's been getting along
on that ever since. Fifty-six years he’s been home free. Doesn’t notice the garden or the flowers or anything; it’s all perfect; all perfect. You do have to pay some attention to what you tell people.

(laughter) I told you about the time I heard my own voice saying, ”Wherever you are is--“

RR: Yes.

EK: Oh, God. (laughter) That’s the problem with this sort of thing. It’s always there to haunt you, you know. I can’t tell you the number of people who say, "And you said. . . ." And I think, "Oh my God," but it turns out to be some innocuous thing that’s perfectly all right, but I always have this--(holds her breath, cringing)

RR: Because you don’t know what you said.

EK: No, I have no idea what I’ve said, you know. It’s like little children that go out babies and come home all dressed up with a degree and you think, "Uh-oh." It has taught me--well, you know, the man painted the fireplace. . . .[He painted over the fireplace when she had not been paying attention and she was shocked to see what he had done.] It’s a great lesson to me every time I see it because I’m always telling people, awareness, awareness. And I was right there in the room but I had my back turned. . . .

You know, these lessons. Freud said it’s all
awareness, awareness of the self, awareness of the world and what's in between. His recognition that there was something in between, the unconscious, Dr. Arnold Toynbee considered the greatest contribution of the twentieth century. We know now that the conscious mind is not too much, but it's all we have so we have to pay attention.

Now, darling, shuffle them--yes, we live and move and have our being in an enormous field of energy. Total awareness of that is called samadhi, cosmic consciousness, nirvana. Dr. Jung called it the universal unconscious. He said it was all that we know and are not aware of at the moment. If there's harmony between that unconscious and what we're actually doing, we are not self-destructive. If there's lack of harmony, we're very self-destructive. And we can do that, you know, in conversation, in the way we dress, and in our surroundings. It's so insidious, you know.

There's a difficulty behind you; the future's very bright; wonderful. You have made, you've made a connection, and you've crossed over, and now you don't have to do that anymore. Yes, it's mature, mature. It's what we're here for. It's vital not to be discouraged.

There's a lot of spiritual progress; great spiritual progress; and communication leads to a
decision. And I do think there's something painful that you learn, but it seems to give you more freedom; and I think there's a much greater sense of security in a relationship because of a change. And this is a person who doesn't see the future and doesn't have too much understanding of this particular thing. Nevertheless, it's a great breakthrough, and there's a new understanding in your life that really overcomes some hidden stress. I think the thing that gives the greatest freedom is accepting that people are doing all they can. If we were in their place we would do the same thing. And that it is going forward; that the universe is benign; that we're loved and understood and cared for.

RR: Does that relationship get better?
LK: Yes, enormously better, mmmmm, enormously better. Really an awakening and an ending of seeing--people are like diamonds, and they have these incredible facets, and I think we can zero in on different ones, you know. And it is true, they're all there. Just as we--very irritating to us to have people focus in on one little thing that happens to be true, but it isn't the main thing. And I think we have to accept that people are doing their best. I think the main thing here is to know what you're doing and why you're doing it and take full responsibility. I don't think you can search out
people who are going to be completely understanding or loving or honest. I think you just have to--people are there and the main thing, the focus should be on our own behavior. . . .

This is a change that's very rewarding. Oh great, oh great! Giant forward. And this is going to take awhile for this wish to come. It comes through something that's difficult, but it overcomes disappointment and leads to new awareness. And it's enriching, brings more love. I think it's not all that much; I think probably in four. Yeah, four--days or weeks or months. Very enriching. But this (tapping the table) is the big thing, a greater sense of security in a relationship. I don't think that's in one person; I think that's relating to the animus in general.

RR: Why do you say animus?

EK: I think as long as we have to connect with the animus out here--(interruption)--Yes, eventually we recognize that we contain equal amounts of feminine and masculine energy. That's not male and female; it's masculine in the sense of logic and order and assertiveness, and--you know all this--and the feminine is compassion and awareness and intuition, and the more we come to depend on our own, when we relate to that within ourselves--this is one of the big things in
femininity: when women relate to that masculinity within themselves. Dr. Jung says that the anima or animus is a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious.

RR: Should I shuffle these?

EK: Yes, darling, oh wait, wait, wait. Yes, I get lost in all this. . . . Now, darling, you shuffle those; everything will be fine. This is a little bit of being fed up with the material—wanting to get into more substantial things. And I think there’s a deepening of relationships; they’re more gratifying. And there’s a great deal of inner success. I think you’re in a very good place. Really, it’s all in our own little heads, you know, the way we see it. . . . Your own efforts are going to make things go forward. I do think that there’s some concern over the future of your career, but don’t worry about it because it’s going to work out. I think that’s just anxiety. This is all going to work out. It works out through relationships, and it’s a very strengthening period. I think things are going to work out wonderfully. You just—I think you’re doing exactly the right thing, just doing each day. It’ll work. It’s very important to know things will go well.

Now, shuffle those, and concentrate on the same thing. . . . Now, cut them toward you with your left
hand. Good, good, good. Things are going to work our very well through understanding and it's very, very strengthening. You're bringing past experience and your goals and--what you know and what you have experienced and your anticipation is getting together, instead of having it separated. Yes, a great deal of progress. You've done wonderfully, wonderfully. It's all going to work out very, very well, and through your own efforts. And relationships are going to be very rewarding. And there's a lot of emotional happiness. I think there's some kind of confrontation in connection with this wish so that--that's what's so enriching about it. It becomes more, not real, I think more in touch so it seems like it's more here than off. Yes, I think it's great progress, great progress and real achievement. I think you're in a very good place, dear. I think there's a great deal of harmony and a lot of blessings in your life. I think you're doing very well.

Remember that knowing things will go well is prayer. And this one woman said, well, is there something that she could say, you know, and I said, "Yes, just say, 'Thank you, thank you, thank you.'" It's a very powerful form of prayer. And repeating something really changes the vibrations. I have found that Lotus Sutra to be enormously helpful. You know, I
can walk and talk and see and hear, and I can cook, thank God. We’re not living on Kentucky Fried Chicken anymore. . . . Oh, I think things are going to work out wonderfully. Not to worry; not to worry. I think we just have to keep pressing forward.

Liz began the reading, as she always does, with a mini-talk or sermon, the message of which, as I argued in the last chapter, has varied little in the fifteen years I have known her: There is nothing separate in the universe; we’re part of it all; it is going forward; we are loved and understood and cared for beyond comprehension; the universe is benign. She presents a view of the universe as nurturing and supportive and teaches that "we are here to nourish each other."

As she interprets the cards, she then exemplifies her teaching by providing that nourishment and support. She does this through praise: "I think you’re in a very good place;" "You’ve done wonderfully"; through encouragement and positive predictions: "This is all going to work out." "I think things are going to work out wonderfully"; and through teaching the proper attitude, a lesson she provided in the form of a brief anecdote about gratitude as "a powerful form of prayer."

The reading is part of the whole context of spiritual counselling. In this particular reading, she counselled me
a great deal about relationships, about accepting that "people are doing their best." In other readings she has recommended books, provided a chant, affirmation or prayer to recite, or suggested attending a religious service. The reading is thus a way to provide personalized instruction and guidance as well as nurturance. Through it Elizabeth Kelly not only teaches a healing view of the universe, but also enables people to experience such a universe in the sacred atmosphere she has created in her own home. This transformation of a private or domestic space into a public one devoted to sacred purposes parallels the way Elizabeth Kelly has learned and teaches others to sacralize daily life, an attitude that has grown out of her life as a woman, and that is reflected in her rhetoric and discourse.

As Jeanne Achterburg writes,

A thread of consciousness weaves through the centuries, connecting one era of women healers to the next. It relates to the feminine myth—the behaviors, abilities and belief systems traditionally associated with women. Whether the myth originates in culture or biology is debatable and somewhat irrelevant—it simply is. In terms of healing, the feminine myth relates to such attributes as intuition, nurturance and compassion. When expressed in professional practice, it supports the virtues of nature as healing resources, and the
Elizabeth Kelly articulates this "feminine myth" in the female symbols she uses to describe herself and her work, in the emphasis on nurturing she brings to her counselling techniques, and in the vision of reality she tries to instill. In making herself available to attend to the inner lives of those who seek her help, she supplies what many find missing in the healing arts today as they are dispensed by medical doctors and psychiatrists as well as the clergy. As Jeanne Achterberg and others have argued, the need for the feminine voice in healing, with its respect for nature and the earth, has become urgent, not only in the health care of individuals, but in the continuance of life on the planet. "We must be fearlessly willing to manifest in our lives and healing arts what women have always known--the unity of being and the reality of the invisible spaces" (Achterberg 205). This is the message Elizabeth Kelly lives and teaches.
Notes


2. Amongst Elizabeth Kelly's correspondence was a letter from a local psychologist thanking her for her recent referrals. The note adds, "A recommendation from you is highly valued. Thank you for your trust and confidence in me."

3. H.M. Parshley, translator and editor, adds the following note: This word, frequently used by the author, always signifies, ... , the opposite or negation of transcendence, such as confinement or restriction to a narrow round of uncreative and repetitious duties; it is in contrast to the freedom to engage in projects of ever widening scope that marks the untrammeled existent (de Beauvoir 71).

4. In referring to "what a mother does for her child," I do not assume that all mothers are nurturing, that when they are nurturing they nurture in the same way, or that men, or women who are not biological or adoptive mothers, do not nurture. In attempting to define "maternal thinking," which she believes emerges from "maternal practice," or what mothers do, Sara Ruddick writes, Maternal practice begins in a response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world. To be a 'mother' is to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantial part of one's work life. . . . These three demands--for preservation, growth and social acceptability--constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by works of preservative love, nurturance, and training (Ruddick 1989, 17).

The way this work will be carried out will of course vary according to gender, race, class and ethnicity. Ruddick says, in the article on which her later book was based, "I will be drawing upon my knowledge of the institutions of motherhood in middle-class, white, Protestant, capitalist, patriarchal America as these have expressed themselves in the heterosexual nuclear family in which I mother and was mothered" (Ruddick 1980, 347). These qualifications also apply to my statements about Elizabeth Kelly, who mothered and was mothered in a similar family and who exists in a similar culture. I argue that her work with her clients resembles the work of mothering as it is defined here in terms of "preservative love, nurturance and training."
5. The association between women and mothering and hence the "feminine" powers of nurturance, etc. can be understood as a social rather than a biological fact, since in all societies women are the primary caretakers of children, and girls are socialized from a young age for this role (Wedenoja 94).

6. Elaine J. Lawless discusses the importance of maternal imagery in the discourse of Pentecostal women pastors. She sees their use of such imagery as a way to maintain powerful positions without threatening deeply held beliefs about female subservience to male authority, especially in religious matters (Lawless 1993, 258). Since Elizabeth Kelly is not part of any church or institution, this point does not apply to her. However, insofar as powerful women in any public sphere are still viewed with suspicion in contemporary society, it is possible that her "motherliness" makes her power and authority non-threatening and therefore easier for some people to accept.

7. See the full text of this talk, Appendix B.

8. Ancient peoples throughout the world worshipped the Great Mother Goddess. Maria Gimbutas writes, "It is obvious that the Goddess, not gods, dominated the Old European pantheon; the Goddess ruled absolutely over human, animal and plant life. The Goddess, not gods, spontaneously generated the life force and created the universe" (Gimbutas 24).

The mother goddess was gradually supplanted by male gods in patriarchal religions. Barbara Walker writes,

To enforce their view, patriarchal priesthoods had to eliminate the 'Thousand-Named Goddess' whose images were embedded in the cultures of the whole Eurasian land mass. The religion of the Great Mother was theologically very different from that of the Heavenly Father--whose remoteness from the earth was implied by his very title. The Great Mother was the earth, as well as the sea, the moon, the Milky Way, the elements, mountains, rivers, . . . stones, vegetation, women, time, fate, intelligence, birth, love, and death. Her scriptures credited her with the initial creation of the universe and everything in it, as well as the ongoing creation and temporary preservation of each individual creature. She was also the destroying Crone, who brought an end to each life and eventually would destroy the universe itself at doomsday, only to prepare a new creation in her next cycle. (Walker 1985, 21).

9. As John Blofield explains, Kuan Yin . . . means She-Who-Hearkens-to-the-Cries-of-the-World, and is a translation of the Sanskrit name of her chief progenitor, Avalokitesvara (or Avalokita). In Korea and Japan and, above all, in China before the Red flood engulfed her temples there, Kuan Yin has been
popularly revered as a goddess for a thousand years or more, though in truth she is not a goddess but a celestial Bodhisattva and was formerly embodied in male form, as is sometimes the case to this day (Blofield 17).

Blofield speculates as to how this transformation of the image from a male to a female form took place. For my purposes, it is significant that this female image, whatever its ancestry, is important to Elizabeth Kelly.

10. See Appendix A.

11. Because this reading was done after we had begun the interviews, there was at times a blurring of the boundaries between these two activities. At this particular point, life history information that must remain confidential was deleted. Other deletions, indicated by ellipsis marks, have also been made in order to highlight the process of the reading and the particular techniques Elizabeth Kelly employs to provide spiritual guidance.
In the previous chapter I looked at Elizabeth Kelly's message and healing techniques in the context of "women's healing." Here, in my conclusion, I would like to come back to questions with which I began the project, and look at Elizabeth Kelly's life and work in the context of feminism.

Feminism may be irrelevant to Elizabeth Kelly and to the many individuals who seek her help. My discussing her in the context of this issue may seem imposed and even offensive to some. Clearly, feminism is not what Elizabeth Kelly is mainly about. However, as James Clifford has argued, "ethnographic texts are inescapably allegorical" (Clifford 99), not only regarding their subjects but also regarding the researchers themselves. Marjorie Shostak's book, Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman, for example, is, Clifford argues, "a Western feminist allegory, part of the reinvention of the general category 'woman' in the 1970's and 80's" (Clifford 104). It is also Shostak's "search for personal knowledge." That is, Shostak "dramatizes through her own quest the way a narrated life makes sense, allegorically, for another" (Clifford 107).
What this means for our scholarship, Clifford writes, is "that as readers and writers of ethnographies, we struggle to confront and take responsibility for our systematic constructions of others and of ourselves through others" (Clifford 121).

While what I have produced is not strictly speaking an ethnography, but rather an oral history study that draws upon ethnographic methods, the same issues and hence responsibilities are present and must be acknowledged. I must confront the fact that, like Shostak's interest in Nisa, my interest in Elizabeth Kelly, and in the gender issues raised by her life and message, has been propelled by a searching personal as well as scholarly question: Elizabeth Kelly enabled me to reclaim spirituality, a powerful healing force in my life, but did doing so mean that I was repudiating feminism, a force that has been equally healing? Does embracing spirituality mean repudiating feminism? How do I reconcile the two? While this is not Elizabeth Kelly's question, but rather my own, I believe it is an important question, one that has implications beyond my own personal story. It is important not only with regard to the many women who have been profoundly influenced by Elizabeth Kelly,--indeed, most of her clients are women-- but also for other feminists seeking to reconcile their spirituality and their politics. Although I have not been able to resolve this question
fully, I feel closer now than I did at the beginning to an understanding of how Elizabeth Kelly's spiritual vision complements feminism.

In interviewing Elizabeth Kelly about her life, I came to see how that life has been conditioned by gender. I also have come to understand that her particular solution, through religion and spirituality, has helped her, not to transcend gender, but to live a more fulfilling life within the restrictions and limitations gender has imposed. This is also the message she passes on to others. While this sounds like adaptation to society rather than transformation, which is the true goal of feminism, I see the strategies Liz employed in her own life and that she teaches to others as profoundly empowering. As such they can be seen as a covert feminism; an effort at resistance.

"In the most general terms," Ursula King writes, "feminism has been described as a movement to overcome the oppression of and discrimination against women which is deeply embedded in our social and cultural institutions" (King 4). Gerda Lerner articulates this definition of feminist consciousness:

I define feminist consciousness as the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that their condition of subordination is not
natural but societally determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternate vision of societal organization in which women as well as men enjoy autonomy and self-determination (Lerner 14).

While Elizabeth Kelly is most certainly opposed to oppression and discrimination in any form, her emphasis is not on the transformation of institutions but on the transformation of individual consciousness. She grants little power to gender, race, class, or sexual orientation. The focus of her teaching and indeed of her life is on the realization of the unity that she believes underlies all such divisions. For Elizabeth Kelly, the spiritual and the political are not separate. Her message, like most spiritual points of view, is based on the assumption that the transformation of the individual will mean the transformation of society. Paramahansa Yogananda wrote, in Autobiography of a Yogi, a text which profoundly influenced her, "Utopia must spring in the private bosom before it can flower in civic virtue, inner reforms leading naturally to outer ones" (Yogananda 560-561).

Consistent with this view, Elizabeth Kelly teaches, "When we have a greater awareness of truth, we will provide food and shelter for everyone. We won’t have the homeless
or the hungry. The tax structure will change; we will have a world government." While Alan Paton writes, expressing a view shared by feminists and other political activists, "[T]here are some changes in man that cannot be achieved without some changes in society" (Paton 11), Liz believes social changes will come, inevitably, out of the spiritual growth and advancement of individuals; that each individual’s efforts to change her or himself contributes to the evolution of humankind: "In spite of what you see on TV or read in the papers, if you can convince yourself the universe is benign, that things will go well, you function on a different level, and if enough people can function on that level it will get better."

While Liz does not think in terms of feminist analysis, most of the time I have not found that our two perspectives contradict one another. Rather, despite what might appear to be irreconcilable differences, they seem to coexist quite peacefully. As I have thought more analytically about Liz’s message, I have discovered that there are several reasons why this is so. The first is that, when she is asked about it, Liz reveals that she has always been sympathetic to feminism and other movements for social justice:

EK: I have this obsession with women’s liberation.
Yes, I had an older brother and from the time I was very small I was very resentful that there was such a
difference. He was a boy; and he could go wherever he wanted to go. They would say be back at twelve o’clock or whatever and in those days whistles blew, you know, and so you could get back when the whistle blows, and out he would go. And I couldn’t go anywhere. I never thought it was protection. I just thought it was being caged and imprisoned and in my heart I was very bitter. So confining. And then, when I grew older, and found out that boys could just go and do whatever came naturally and nobody thought anything of that, whereas if girls--poor girls had to be in and they had to be proper and they had to wear gloves and they had to do this and that. And the clothing you know; yes, and after a certain age you had to wear a girdle and--you didn’t need a girdle, but, oh yes, it would hold up your hose. I remember. And then they had garter belts, but I thought they were ghastly. I didn’t like the girdle, but I didn’t like the garter belt; it was worse. But all these things; I felt infringement, you know. And so when the sixties rolled around, finally, I thought, where have they been all this time, you know? So I was for liberation since before Betty Friedan was born; but I believe that washers and dryers and polyester fabrics and abortions and pro-choice and equal opportunity for learning--because if anyone was going to be educated it was the boys.
RR: And the vote?
EK: Yes, and the vote, oh yes, definitely the vote, and I remember before the vote, I remember people saying no, women shouldn't vote, and I thought, I must have been about seven or eight, but I remember thinking why in the world, why couldn't they vote, why would they even have any argument about it? It seemed so absolutely normal that what men could do women could do too. . . . I feel that women are gaining their equality through their own efforts, through insisting upon rights and because they have some kind of legal recourse. . . .
RR: Do you think it helps to have a movement?
EK: Oh, I think it's wonderful. Yes, if they hadn't organized heaven knows when they would have been able to vote. If the black people hadn't gone down there and said we're not going to put up with it anymore, they would still be an inferior race and would have to protest. You have to protest. You have to protest daily. . . . I think women's lives require such an incredible amount of sacrifice and behind the scene, you know, it's never out where people say, "Oh, ah--" you know, always back stage at the opera and then really all they can be judged by are their children. But the thing is, the woman really does have the trump card because without her there wouldn't be any family.
She is the heart and soul because if she doesn’t function they’re not going to have a family. . . .
Everybody knows that all these men had mothers and wives and children and influences and mistresses and whatever and no matter how they’re out there it was the background that made them. They didn’t do it all by themselves.

At the same time, however, that she grants the limitations of gender in our society, she finally believes that the individual can transcend these obstacles:

RR: Don’t you think your life would be very different if you were male?
EK: Well, I hope that if I were a man and I had had those advantages, that I can see that men have, I would have taken more advantage of the opportunities in my life. I think the only difference would be that I would have a greater awareness and recognized opportunities. I think I was so caught up in my resentment and nursing what I thought of as my disadvantages that I refused to take advantage of the things that I could have.
RR: But there were real restrictions out there too.
EK: Oh yes, very genuine, but I believe that by not
paying attention to them and by focusing in on what you want to accomplish that you can overcome anything. I think by giving value to things and saying, "Well, I can't do that because I'm a woman or I can't do that because mama won't like it, or you know, all this and that--that is diminishing. So I think just focusing in on what you want to accomplish--

Even in the following passage, which begins with an acknowledgment of the greater freedom women began to enjoy in the twenties, she ends with an assertion that the individual can transcend the prescriptions of society:

EK: When I was young, a woman was what her father or her brother or her husband was, and she was not anything else. And it didn't matter how clever or beautiful or charming; she was only a reflection and was really never regarded as anything. Then in the twenties, really that was incredible, because all these women had been going around in these long skirts, you know, and all of a sudden you could see everybody's legs and it was amazing. And then their hair, you know, all this hair wadded up on top and then all of a sudden, no hair. Really, it was a dramatic change brought about by the war. Incredible. And of course
there were people who plunged into that, and then there were other people--I remember these two women in Washington who continued to dress with their hair up and these clothes and everybody would just gasp and there they were and then they looked very elegant and beautiful and like they had come from Mars, you know? And they were very happy with their lives and I thought that was very remarkable that you didn’t have to do what everybody does; that you could wear [what you wanted] and that was encouraging to me. I don’t think that until this moment I’ve ever verbalized that, but I always liked seeing those people because I realized then that you could do what you wanted to. You would have to put up with people sneering and laughing and pointing and saying Neeeaa, but you could do it. And that seemed to me more gratifying than all that other stuff, because even when I was a child I knew that that stuff didn’t matter.

In the following passage, Liz acknowledges that gender is socially constructed and that it profoundly affects the way we perceive and respond to one another but she does not acknowledge the ways these perceptions have been institutionalized:

EK: Well frankly, I have always felt that we’re all in
this soup together because, you see I had an older brother and while I did resent the fact that he had more freedom and could do things that I couldn’t do, but still in all I always felt that we were human beings. I did have a great deal of difficulty with the masculine and feminine, but I worked it out. Yes, I worked it out very clearly. First I recognized I had a problem. I was fifty years old at this time --[a] late learner--and I recognized that there was something wrong in the way that I related to men and women. And so I thought, well, I will find out. So for a week I thought, if everybody is a woman, how would I treat them? And so I did, and I was terribly critical and I wanted everybody to shape up. And I was very judging and really--unkind. Then when I was in a week where it was all men everything was wonderful; everything is perfectly fine, perfectly fine; and I realized that both attitudes were stupid. One was too undiscriminating and the other one was too judgmental. And then I recognized that if you just thought of them as people and treated them as individuals, not men and women, but just relating to the individual, and relating to them with the idea and realization that the divine energy is equally in every person and in that you just want to treat the person as you would want to be treated if you were that person; it’s all, you know,
if they're friends or relatives or somebody in the supermarket and how you would want to be treated. And so my concern ever since has not been with men and women but with recognition of who the person is... I think that we have to recognize people are individuals and grow up to express their genes and education and background and whatnot, and are not all that much examples of [their own] influence anyway. So I don't think we should ever get hung up on that.

Thus, while she clearly sees the great need for social action, her own "intervention," as she calls it, is on the level of the individual, of consciousness.

As a feminist for whom spirituality has become increasingly important, I struggle with the apparent conflict between these two views. The emphasis on the individual encouraged by most spiritual teachings makes it easier to overlook the power that social and political structures, institutions and systems have on our lives. They encourage people to seek personal rather than collective solutions, and in doing so, ultimately reinforce the status quo. For feminists this is especially problematic with regard to the victimization of women, which religion attributes to the evils of human nature and life on earth rather than, as feminists do, to the evils of patriarchy. While spiritual teachings evoke love and
forgiveness, acceptance, faith and prayer, feminism evokes anger and blame and work towards social change. Equally troublesome is the fact that the lessons of surrender and service, so central to what many traditional religions teach, seem to reinforce women's traditional roles and call into question the basic assumption of feminism that women's lives have been compromised by too much self sacrifice rather than too little.

On the other hand, women who come to spirituality out of crisis may find themselves empowered by it in ways they are not by feminism. In a letter to the editor of Ms. magazine one woman, responding to criticism of twelve-step groups, in which spirituality is central, wrote:

Among other gifts, feminism gave me a global sisterhood and helped clarify my reality, but it did not give me a way to live life sanely, moment by moment, with serenity and peace of mind, minus destructive, compulsive, addictive, dysfunctional behavior. The 12 steps have made me a healthier, stronger feminist (Name Withheld by Request 8).

This view was reiterated by bell hooks in a recent article: "Feminist theory," she says, "rarely...provides any actual strategies for altering everyday lives" (hooks 40). Spiritual practice, whether in the form of a twelve-step...
program or the techniques of daily living taught by Liz, helps people to deal with their daily personal lives.

Here I find a second way in which spiritual teachings like those of Elizabeth Kelly may come together with feminism. As Betthina Aptheker argues,

Women focus on improving the quality of daily life . . . In the context of a society in which the quality of daily life is continually undermined and in which connections between people are continually threatened, such strategies, which form the sinews of life, are strategies of resistance (Aptheker 180).

While feminists work to change the material conditions of women’s lives, Liz works to change psychological, emotional and spiritual conditions, to empower people against the forces of despair and hopelessness. "Women’s resistance is informed by the logic of survival" (Aptheker 174), Aptheker writes, and survival, in the form of coping with daily life and making it better for oneself and others in whatever ways one is able, is at the center of Liz Kelly’s system of values. As Carl Jung wrote, "Is there any better truth about ultimate things than the one that helps you to live?" (qtd. in Santa Maria 17).

Aptheker argues that women’s resistance must be defined in a different way, one that may not necessarily be
demonstrated by collective or social action, but by the efforts of individual women who do what they can every day to survive and to create the best life they can for their children. Such efforts, she feels, have a cumulative effect on social change (Aptheker 173). The same may be said, I believe, for Elizabeth Kelly's efforts to help her clients. In giving them tools, in the form of spiritual practice, to help them "get through the day," she is in effect empowering them. Her own life is the best example of such empowerment, as she describes herself as having changed from someone who could not cope and who did not see choices to someone who, through spiritual discipline, feels she has a great deal of choice every day and who has been able to significantly improve her life.

Elizabeth Kelly is, among other things, a mystic. "Mysticism is often defined as an experiential knowledge of God, a knowledge based on experience rather than rational deduction and suffused with love" writes Ursula King (King 109). Mysticism, says Gerda Lerner, is "an alternate mode of thought to patriarchal thinking" (Lerner 77). Both writers show that mysticism has historically been a source of power for women:

Medieval women were kept out of the universities; they could not become scholastic theologians, but many achieved distinction through becoming powerful writers.
on spirituality and mysticism, providing spiritual leadership and counsel to others. These were women of great independence and power, not so much in external terms, but in terms of moral authority and spiritual perfection (King 104).

In the example of women mystics of the past, King argues, and I would add in the example of contemporary women mystics like Elizabeth Kelly,

One can. . .discover and accentuate the liberating qualities of mysticism which gave particular women not power over but power for, enabling power, to seek spiritual, personal and social freedom which entailed further power for advising, teaching, writing, counselling and helping others as well as power for building and transforming communities. Female mystics thus exemplify to an extraordinary degree women's struggle for autonomy and self-affirmation, crowned by the liberating experience of self-transcendence (King 106).

Most important, mysticism gave women a sense of authority based on their own direct experience of the divine. Gerda Lerner shows "how women through mystical experience found the assertiveness and authority necessary
to speak, teach and influence people" (Lerner 88). Nellie McKay, in a more recent historical example, discusses the ways "[r]eligious faith meant self-empowerment" in nineteenth century black women's spiritual autobiographies. "Their faith gave them the self-assurance they needed to search out the positive identity that other circumstances in their lives denied" (McKay 150). Similarly, in encouraging women to develop their spirituality from within, to trust themselves, and to develop their inner wisdom, Liz seeks to empower them.

A third reason I have found for the compatibility of Elizabeth Kelly's teachings with feminism is that, while they may diverge from materialist feminism, they overlap in some ways, as do many teachings of the New Age Movement, with feminist spirituality. The feminist spirituality movement, though difficult to define, can be said generally to be concerned with a critique of organized or institutionalized religions, especially of the West, for their exclusively male imagery of the divine and for the barring of women within their hierarchies from positions of power as well as for a dualistic worldview that is seen as destructive to all human beings, especially women, to nature and to the planet as a whole. In an effort to reclaim for women a connection with the divine many have turned to the creation of new religions with worship of the Goddess at their center. Others have attempted to change traditional
religions from within through research into forgotten or lost texts, reinterpretation of canonical scriptures, or changes in language and liturgies for greater inclusiveness of women. They also advocate admitting women to the priesthood or other positions of leadership.

Elizabeth Kelly has never been much invested in representations of the divine as either male or female. "It matters more that we love God," she said, "than that we call God by any particular name. . . . God has many aspects to help us personalize the impersonal, but names of the One should not divide us" (Kelly 1). Although the Buddhist organization to which she now belongs appears to be patriarchal in its hierarchy as well as in some of its teachings, as is Self Realization Fellowship, I believe that the shift in her spiritual history from Christian religions, which have no concept of the divine as female, to Eastern religions with their pantheon of gods and goddesses, reveals her attraction to traditions that value the feminine principle.¹

Elizabeth Kelly, unlike those in the feminist spirituality movement, has never been concerned with issues of female leadership within religious hierarchies. But by assuming certain "priestly" functions: teaching and preaching; providing spiritual counselling; blessing; mediating, in her healing rituals, between the human and the divine, and presiding as she has at times at weddings,
christenings and an exorcism, she embodies and models female power, which, until recently, has been missing from mainstream religions.⁴

Shoshanah Feher writes,

Traditionally, women’s voices have been silenced in mainstream religions. Because these religions have been male dominated, the experiences of women have not been heard. The New Age movement, however, [like the feminist spirituality movement,] has allowed women to break away from male-centered ideology and religious institutions (Feher 183).

The New Age Movement has roots in the New Thought Movement of the nineteenth century, which saw the founding of religions such as Christian Science by Mary Baker Eddy, and Unity by Myrtle Fillmore. Significantly, Elizabeth Kelly was exposed to both of these religions in her youth. Feher points out that "there has often been a high degree of female leadership in these churches" (Feher 184).

Elizabeth Kelly also shares with those in the feminist spirituality movement a critique of the dualism of Western religions, particularly their emphasis on good and evil:

I think people have to get beyond good and evil.

261
I think if they can just think of the green angels, the nature spirits, who are into enriching life, and you know, at Findhorn they--really, you can converse with the trees and shrubs, you know. And acknowledgment that they’re there. I think you do that with fertilizer and care.

Her thinking is consistent, here and elsewhere, with pre-patriarchal religions that worshipped the Great Goddess or Great Mother, strains of which still remain in Eastern religions. As Jeanne Achterberg explains,

In the primal earth mother religions, the existence of evil did not cause problems in logic. The Great Goddess embodied the forces of both dark and light; hence, her worship constituted a monistic theology, combining good and evil in a single deity (Achterberg 68).

Elizabeth Kelly also shares with feminist spirituality a critique of the view that nature and humanity are "fallen." Rather than seeing nature as fallen or evil, she sees harmony with nature as a path to wholeness. Indeed, a reverence for nature and the earth is apparent in much of what she has said, both in the interviews and in talks. In _Spiritual Journey_, she spoke of how, as a child, she was
aware of "the spirits in nature":

We lived in Lakewood, Ohio, and I understood, through this inner communication, that an oak forest had been slashed down in a very indifferent, even savage way, and the residue of that pain was there. I told my brother how unfortunate it was that the cutters had not even acknowledged the trees in any way. Though trees do not have brains, all things have a certain level of consciousness. You can cut down a tree, but it is good to tell it so, to acknowledge its existence. That is why you should acknowledge the life around you; touch the plants and trees. Otherwise it is as if you are in a house with people you never speak to. We have a very symbiotic relationship with everything. God is in everything, and we should relate to that awareness (Kelly 23).

In commenting on this passage in one of the interviews, she said,

I feel like the earth is a living thing, so when you dig a hole in it, you know, try to just put something in and not make too big a mess. It's very painful to see plowing. You know, the Indians, they live practically in a desert, but they just make a little
hole and pray a lot; you know--awareness.

In all of these examples, Liz echoes what Achterberg calls the "earth-mother religions":

When the gods lived in the earth, the whole planet was worshipped as the manifestation of the divine. The rivers, the rocks, and especially humans were the inhabitants of a sacred place. All--what we call living and non-living alike--was alive and related. All humans breathed the breath of the spirit and drank the waters of the spirit. In most tribal and early cultures, this was the prevalent system of belief (Achterberg 188).

Both the New Age and the feminist spirituality movements, in the words of Mary Farrell Bednarowski, "understand the sacred as immanent within the natural world, the body, the psyche":

To perceive the divine as immanent counteracts the fear that we are alone in a lifeless universe leading lives that are meaningless in any cosmic sense. Immanence, likewise, implies that the sacred aspect of reality is accessible. We find the divine within ourselves,
within each other, within nature (Bednarowski 172).

This belief is linked to another that New Age and feminist spirituality share: the belief in the oneness, the interconnectedness of all things. "It is the insistence on the immanence of the sacred that fosters the primary value shared by both movements: radical, ontological interconnectedness, interrelatedness" (Bednarowski 172).

Elaine J. Lawless finds that even contemporary women ministers in mainstream religions share this value, as their concepts of God are reflected in images of connection: "connection to animals, to the sea, to the natural order of all things in the universe, to other people, to God, to the sense of a divine presence" (Lawless 1993, 261). Interconnectedness, interrelatedness can also be seen as the cardinal values of Elizabeth Kelly's philosophy, as she begins her readings and most of her lectures with the statement that "nothing is separate."

Liz Kelly's belief that "the divine energy is equally in every person" has special significance for women, as is suggested by the following remarks:

I am very concerned with what I consider to be the right way for me to behave and I am concerned with the divine energy, and I am concerned that I too contain that divine energy and the proper respect to me because
of that energy. So I have to really insist that that be regarded within me, so I cannot allow people to treat me in ways that I think are not proper. You contain that divine energy and it’s your obligation to see that is not mistreated. And that is why women should not put up with being battered or mistreated. . . . I do not believe that you should submit yourself to behavior in others you find intolerable.

It has not always been possible, certainly it has not been easy, for women in our society to believe that they contain divine energy. At one time in the history of western civilization, women were not thought to have souls. The belief that one should not submit oneself to behavior in others that one finds intolerable certainly runs counter to traditional female socialization with its emphasis on self-sacrifice, especially as it has been enforced through traditional religions, and it has always been a basic value of feminism. "The feminist vision proclaims the full humanity of women, their freedom and liberation from all forms of oppression" (King 197).

Another way that Elizabeth Kelly’s teachings overlap with both New Age and feminist spirituality is in the idea that everyone has access to the sacred. In Spiritual Journey Liz says, "There is incredible power available to anyone" (Kelly 20). Explaining various spiritual
techniques, she adds, "Anyone can do that. These things are not in some tiny, secret package that only some people have and nobody else can share. Everything is around us all the time" (Kelly 20). Feher explains, "... in the New Age movement, the relationship to God is direct. It is a nonhierarchical system, unlike mainline religions" (184). She writes, further,

...traditional religion encourages its adherents to look away from themselves to some external authority. The New Age encourages people to look away from external authority and within themselves. The New Age may be considered by some to be a feminist spirituality: women are empowered by a spiritual relationship which is not determined by men. In this way women's spirituality is empowering. It allows women to take control of their lives (Feher 187).

It is thus not surprising that more women than men are attracted to New Age thought (Achterberg 180; Feher 183;) and that women make up most of Liz Kelly’s clientele. Feher notes, "Wherever there are feminist communities, women are reexploring psychic phenomena that advocate personal control: astrology, Tarot, goddess-centered philosophies, ESP, etc" (Feher 187).
Elizabeth Kelly does not formally worship the goddess, nor does she consider herself a witch, nor is she even, ostensibly, a feminist. Her teachings are extremely eclectic, drawing from both Eastern and Western traditions as well as the "earth-mother" religions Achterberg describes, and she does not address gender specifically in her discourse. However, I believe she resembles the nineteenth century women writers that Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar wrote about, who "created submerged meanings, meanings hidden within or behind the more accessible, 'public' content of their works, so that their literature could be read and appreciated even when its vital concern with female dispossession and disease was ignored" (Gilbert and Gubar 72).

A similar idea has been explored in Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture, edited by Joan Newlon Radner. In an introductory essay, Radner and Susan S. Lanser

... argue that the "texts" of women's folklore--the texts of their oral performances, of their material creations, and of the routines of their daily lives--may communicate a variety of messages to different segments of their audiences. Some of the coding that enables this selective communication may be deliberate and conscious; some is unconscious. The essential
ambiguity of coded acts protects women from potentially
dangerous responses from those who might find their
statements disturbing (Radner vii-viii).

Indeed, however much Liz seems to emphasize the
individual and to insist that gender is not important, I
often find a subtle or perhaps covert feminism in what she
says, a fourth reason why her teachings are not inconsistent
with feminism. A striking example is her calling a workshop
she conducted in March of 1991 "Getting in Touch With
Shakespeare’s Sister":

RR: Gail said you were calling your workshop, "Getting
in Touch With Shakespeare’s Sister?"
EK: Oh yes, yes--
RR: I was really curious about that.
EK: In A Room of One’s Own Virginia Woolf says that
Shakespeare had a younger sister who was also very
interested in the arts and theater and when she was
eighteen she went up to London as her brother had done
and she worked in the theater and did things that were
available, but the opportunities for women were very
limited and one winter day she committed suicide and
they buried her at crossroads where the tour bus stops.
(chuckles) And it was Virginia Woolf’s idea that we
all have a little of Shakespeare’s sister--the
unexpressed part--because we feel limited. I think the thing about women's liberation is for women to recognize that they are liberated and that they impose the restrictions; as women my age could only be what their husbands or fathers or sons or brothers were. If you look at pictures of baseball games or after the first--celebration after the first armistice--they're only men. Very few women. Because they were home doing the washing and the ironing and the cleaning. I believe women's liberation has been helped more by washers and dryers and polyester fabrics. I think that has allowed women more freedom. I think that they were kept as--some willing and some unwilling--servants. I think the ones who were willing were dutiful and compliant. And I think many, many women responded like my mother who just wouldn't do housework, and consequently, you know, we had housekeepers but they were not very competent. And ____ has the same attitude. They come from that kind of background. Actually I think a lot of it had to do with slavery. RR: Is that going to be the name of the workshop then? EK: Yes, I thought "Getting in Touch With Shakespeare's Sister," but then I thought, sobering up, that, you know, I could tell them that afterward but probably just say "Getting In Touch With You" through universal
spiritual shapes and colors and images and dreams. And then in the end you make your own soul image.

It is interesting that the title Liz gave to her workshop is an allusion to this feminist work of Virginia Woolf's. Liz uses the idea of untapped potential in a general way, but Woolf was speaking specifically of the untapped creativity of women, and anyone who has read *A Room of One's Own* and recognizes the allusion will also recognize the "feminist message," which Radner and Lanser define as a message "critical of some aspect of women's subordination" (Radner and Lanser 3).

As the authors suggest, the issue of intentionality is complex. "Intention must be inferred from the contextual knowledge available" (Radner and Lanser 7). In the context of this interview Liz addressed the feminist issues raised by her title, and in the context of other interviews and conversations with me she expressed her sympathy with feminist perspectives. In the workshop itself, however, she did not address the issue of creativity in a gender-specific way. But both meanings remain. "[O]ne does not necessarily replace the other but supplements or enhances it or gives it a new twist" (Radner and Lanser 8). Recognizing the allusion may have provided the women attending the workshop with another level of meaning, but anyone, male or female, could benefit from the exercises, which were designed to
enhance creativity.

Elizabeth Kelly's teachings, which emphasize "enriching life" and "making things better," evolved in part from what she has learned about survival as a woman in a patriarchal society. Many of those teachings are also consistent with ancient woman-centered religions, especially her belief that human beings are connected to a nurturing source and that they can realize that connection through nature. They also implicitly and sometimes explicitly criticize the values of contemporary society such as materialism, violence and contempt for nature. While her affiliation with patriarchal religious organizations as well as her reluctance to address gender issues might lead one to conclude that she does not challenge the constructions of the dominant culture, these challenges are, nevertheless, there and are indeed implicit in the very role she occupies. As spiritual teacher, guide and healer she offers a more life-affirming vision and revives the tradition of the wisewoman.

Elizabeth Kelly's work can be seen in three different contexts: religion or spirituality, in her teaching and preaching; psychotherapy, in her counselling and spiritual advising; and self-help literature in her book Spiritual Journey: How to Get Through the Day. Scholars such as Wendy Symonds and Elayne Rapping have examined the role of the
self-help movement in women’s lives in ways that have important implications for Elizabeth Kelly’s work. In her study of what she calls women’s "psycho-religious" self-help reading, Symonds finds:

What these readers shared, regardless of the magnitude of their questions, was a quest for order and for sense. And though many readers articulated their search in specific terms---most also described their reading as part of a struggle to define themselves in terms of everything else, a struggle to gain a coherent worldview. . . . Odd though it may seem, a belief in supreme powers outside the self (which forms the foundation of religious belief) has developed strong ties with a genre [self-help literature] that offers guidance toward gaining supreme faith in the self. . . (Symonds 50).

Faith in the self is something sorely needed by women in a misogynist society. While Symonds and others see the focus on the self encouraged by New Age spirituality, psychotherapy and the self-help movement as escapist, encouraging of self-blame and ultimately reinforcing of the status quo, hence antifeminist, I believe it can be an important part of a woman’s quest for liberation. In conjunction with work toward social change it can also play
a part in social transformation. As Ursula King writes,

From the perspective of spirituality the often quoted feminist statement "The personal is political" can be extended into "The spiritual is personal and political." That is to say spiritual concerns, orientations and choices do not only affect a person's own inner life, but have social and community dimensions: they shape social structure, political behavior and public ethos (King 198).

Furthermore, as Symonds argues, the self-help movement, however apolitical, reveals and speaks to the dissatisfactions of women (Symonds 218). Elayne Rapping argues compellingly that these very dissatisfactions were brought to consciousness by feminism (Rapping 6). While many things have changed for the better for women, the revolution is far from complete. Indeed, we are now experiencing a backlash against feminism. The self-help movement is one way women are attempting to address problems that, as Rapping contends, earlier generations may have been resigned to as "woman's lot" and second wave feminists responded to by organizing for social change.

While it would be a mistake to argue that turning inward to change the self is enough, I do not believe it should be condemned as antifeminist. Rapping writes,
paraphrasing Judith Stacey,

In a postmodern world, ..., women are fashioning various politically unorthodox ways of surviving and finding gratification in life within contradictory institutions and rituals. CODA [Codependents' Anonymous] and the other groups provide stopgap ways for women, feminists, to retain and use some of their previous ideas and values under circumstances which make radical change difficult (Rapping 124).

On one of the breaks during the workshop referred to above I said to Liz I thought she was a feminist. She said, "It keeps slipping out, like a jack in the box, and I push it back down." This statement reveals her reluctance to identify herself with feminism despite her obvious sympathy, in comments she has made during the interviews, with feminist values. Thus it would be a mistake to call Elizabeth Kelly a feminist because she does not see herself as such. I have looked for "feminist messages" in her life and teachings because I wanted to answer, for myself, the question of whether or not they are empowering to women, whether or not they are consistent with feminism. As Radner and Lanser argue, "The recognition of coding--that is, the identification of messages whose feminism is not immediately evident--is a crucial aspect of the reinterpretation of
women's lives and cultures and hence of feminist critical consciousness" (Radner and Lanser 4).

During this workshop, Liz repeated a Sufi proverb: "Anything that makes two out of one is evil. Anything that makes one out of two is good." For Liz to identify herself with feminism would be to identify with separation when what she wants to teach is unity. While addressing men as well as women, she nevertheless communicates, indirectly, an especially empowering message to women.
Notes

1. The comments transcribed here are excerpted from a spontaneous discussion that arose when two women, friends of Liz, dropped by one afternoon during the interviews. This discussion took place on April 14, 1989.

2. For definitions, see the Introduction, endnote #1.

3. Jeanne Achterberg writes,
   
   The concept of the feminine--and masculine--voice, myth, perspective, or principle (terms used interchangeably) is derived from several sources: Eastern philosophy, personality theories (especially Carl Jung’s), research on cognitive styles of males and females, and long-held and widespread cultural mythologies. The typical traits associated with masculine and feminine are relatively--but by no means completely--consistent across time and culture. . . . The myths no doubt have some basis in genetic differences but also are formed through environmental forces (Achterberg 190-191).

   Many contemporary feminist scholars would disagree with these assertions. My own feeling is that notions of the "feminine" and the "masculine" are useful constructs, but that it is important to recognize that they are constructs, and not inevitably tied to biology.

4. Elaine J. Lawless, in Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries of Wholeness Through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography, grants the "blatant and persistent sexism" of most religious denominations in the United States, but maintains, as a result of her research, that women are "changing the 'face' of religion in America today" (Lawless 1993, 1). She writes,

   [Clergywomen] ministered differently and uniquely because they were females: they preached differently; saw God, religion, and spirituality differently; and by their very persistence, could and were changing the focus of religion toward a more process-oriented, liberation-defined, humanistic endeavor (Lawless 1993, 1).
EPILOGUE

As Elizabeth Kelly has "read" me and her other clients in the Tarot cards, I have "read" her in the interviews and her other expressions, both oral and written.¹ My "readings" have emerged slowly and tentatively, over years of thinking about the material as well as over years of relationship. I chose to present the results of my process rather than the process itself, but I can acknowledge here how difficult, how complex that process has been.

My project serves different audiences, and attempts to reconcile things that are difficult, perhaps impossible, to reconcile. I make no claim to having presented the definitive reading of Elizabeth Kelly's life and message. As L.L. Langness and Gelya Frank write, quoting philosopher Abraham Heschel, "Each life harbors a mystery" (Langness and Frank 88). What we write about lives can only be, at best, versions of the truth, "partial truths," as James Clifford has said (Clifford 7). My work is one version; I know there can be others.

A poem Elizabeth Kelly wrote in 1995 is perhaps the best way to end this project, which has to a great extent been about the relationship we have shared:
The mind
Has limits
Unknown
To the heart
Lakota Sioux say
"White man cannot be trusted
Only speaks from the mind."
Truth comes from the heart.
The mind cannot comprehend
Infinity,
Where the heart is at home.
Notes

1. I am indebted to Valerie Lee for this play on the words read and readings.
APPENDIX A

The following are stories told by Elizabeth Kelly which may be of further interest to the reader. Most were told in the context of my interviews with her. I offer these here without commentary or analysis.

Interview, April 13, 1989

There was this big box of tapes [of her talks] that this girl had brought to give to Hap, and they were sitting there on that table. And I was really suffering. And I thought, "Well, if those things are such a big help to people they certainly ought to help me too." So I just reached in and took the tape and put it in and turned the thing on. (dramatic pause) There's nothing worse than hearing your own voice tell you things that you know and don't want to do. And so, there I was, happily saying, "Wherever you are is the best place for you to be," and "Whatever you're doing, it's the most important thing to do that as well as you can,"--I just ground my valves, you know. But I knew it was true; I knew it was true. And so it was very sobering, and I forgot about being miserable and
concentrated upon what had to be done and it all worked, just like I knew it did. But, it isn’t very much fun to take your own medicine.


We are coming into a very rigorous time and we have to recognize that helping one another is the surest way to help our own self; that nothing is separate. I remember, one time in Springfield, I was with a friend who was alcoholic, and we stopped at a liquor store and it was out of town. I never saw anybody buy that much liquor; not at Christmas or New Year’s. She had a bag like this, so she was helpless carrying the bag. And I had a little bottle; and there was a man sprawled on the sidewalk. This was years ago, before homeless was accepted; and he looked like he’d been put--he was just tatters put together, you know. And I thought, "Oh, that dear soul; how sad!" About two seconds later we were eye to eye. My feet went out from under me and I was there--he and I sprawled on the floor together, companions. And my friend, of course, was helpless what with her load and laughter; she was no use at all. And I weighed a lot more then, so I was pretty helpless. The whole situation was unbelievable.
But the thing was that he and I were in precisely the same condition. And I must say that he was like Lord Fauntleroy. He arose, and helped me up with the grace of a lord and opened the car door and got me in--I couldn’t have done it by myself. But he did it with such gallantry, such sympathy, such feeling, that the whole thing was transformed into something that you hoped in your life it might happen again. It was so incredible; so entirely the antithesis of my original thinking: here is this poor soul on the ground.

This is the way life is. We’re never so secure or so safe that in two seconds we can’t be, you know, just on the same eye level. All of these things have great meaning and purpose.

Interview, Dec. 13, 1990

There’s nothing that’s separate. No matter what it is, when you realize it’s part of you there’s nothing left to fear. I told you about the time I saw that horrible thing. Before I started what I laughingly refer to as my career I use to meditate every morning. I’d sit out on that porch, you know; it was warm then. And I would do my meditation with no idea that I was preparing for any kind of future thing; so I wasn’t meditating with the idea that I’m preparing for some world’s great [vocation]; I just did it because it helped.
But there I was in the middle of my little thing and this thing appeared, huge, huge. Mostly it just seemed hairy, but it was so, so otherworldly that—you've heard the expression, "My blood froze in my veins?" Well, it's the most excruciatingly, exquisitely painful thing because you're conscious of all the veins in your body and there's an absolute paralysis of fear. I learned later that many men experience it in battle and it's paralyzing. And it's overwhelmingly painful, and the helplessness! And then you recognize that you have brought it on yourself. I mean it's a pretty tremendous combination. But it's a commonplace thing.

Well anyway, in all of this, I looked at this and I thought, "Well, whatever it is, it's part of me, because there's nothing separate in the universe." At that moment, it disappeared. But it did not disappear before I realized that it was as terrified of me as I was of it. And I can't tell you (laughing) how humiliating it is to think that you frighten somebody that badly when you're just sitting there doing your morning meditation and not trying to be harmful to anything. It was so sobering. And of course it was hysterically funny. So in the midst of all my misery and everything I couldn't help but laughing and laughing because (with change of tone, suddenly sober) it's the way the world is. That is the way the world is.
I just tell everybody to realize that they could all act like Hitler and they could all act like Mother Theresa and--get on with it, you know. I mean, the fantasy that we're some kind of perfect human beings is not true. But we have our little moments. They had a marvelous thing on TV, yes, about the people in Le Chambon who saved over three thousand Jews. They were Huguenots who had been terribly persecuted by the Catholics and they just took in who came and kept the records that would have hung them all in the beehive, so when they thought they might suspect the beehive they put them in this mother's grave in a box.

They were noble people; very simple; very noble. And they didn't act like--they didn't feel like they'd done anything. They did what needed to be done, like farmers, you know, you plow and do what you can. And when they did a study of the people who had helped they found that they were almost all not people with deep spiritual convictions, but just people who really felt--they just didn't think people should be treated that way. They just were people who were doing all they could. But it was inspiring and the man who made the film had learned to walk in this one farmhouse and then his relatives had taken him away. He was just a tiny baby when they brought him. He was there until he learned to walk. They were really marvellous people.
The next two stories were told during the same interview, on Dec. 13, 1990, when Elizabeth Kelly was facing a serious medical crisis:

I think the divine is in charge of whatever and I think if you just do, in the day, all you can, that's fine. No, I think it's very glamorizing to think, "Oh, I have all this [yet to do]." I think you should try every day to do all you can.

Dear St. Francis was hoeing his garden and one of his disciples said, "Master, if you knew you would die at vespers, what would you do today?" And St. Francis leaned on his hoe and he thought about it and he said, "I would finish hoeing my garden." See. That's all you can do. And I think you get into glamor when you think," Oh, people are depending on me," or "I'm so important." I think you should just do all you can, because love is eternal. And you're always with the people you love.

* * *

Well, the thing is that I did all I could to get the very best help and then I thought, you know, there's an old story: Death met the Plague and the Plague said he was going to Damascus and Death said, "How many are you going to
take?" And the Plague said, "I’m only going to take eight." And so later they met and Death said, "I took eleven hundred home. You said you were only going to take eight." And the Plague said, "I only took eight. Fear took all the rest."

You know, some poem, I can’t remember, [says] "Courage is fear that has said its prayers." Because, you know, the Lord Jesus says, "Pray, believing you shall receive." And I think that if you chant or pray or make a novena, then I think you should feel like whatever happens happens and you can’t do any more. And whatever it is it’ll be all right. Because I believe the universe is benign and I’ve had a very good life and been extraordinarily fortunate with my children and my health and everything.

Interview: August 2, 1990

The Catholic church where I would lecture occasionally in Dayton sold all their gold and put the money into the Montessori. It was so sensible. It was the first time I ever went to a rectory where things looked a little run down. I couldn’t adjust. I was so used to everything being so flawless and it was pretty normal. It looked like any household where people have a lot to do, you know, where they do what they can but it’s not sumptuous. They were so marvelous. They had a convent and of course they only had about three nuns where they used to have twenty. So they
put the three nuns I guess in a motel or someplace and they
turned the convent over to these homeless people. It’s the
most sensible thing I ever heard of in the Catholic church.
It’s incredible. It increased-- well I never had lost my
respect, but I must say it went up to the absolute limits
because they were serving; I mean they were true Christians.

And the whole parish turned out. Once a week these
people who had been turned out of mental places, you know,
and were living in the neighborhood, and they had a fairly
good income that the people would take and not even provide
them with toilet paper or enough food. It was scandalous.
And the church people recognized that there wasn’t very much
they could do, but they put them all in their convent and
they know that they’re getting enough to eat and that they
have johnny paper, you know, the necessities. So I think
they are true Christians.

And the women there were volunteers from many churches,
not just [Catholic]. And the dear priest wanted to thank
them so he got this special communion--the nonCatholics
couldn’t have communion, so he just with ordinary wine and
the bread that somebody had baked--we’re going to have
communion. It was so wonderful. And then he said if
anybody wants to say something they can, and of course I had
to get up and say something.

RR: What did you say?

EK: I just said what I usually say, heaven knows what, you
know, "God loves us all," or something. Well this woman flew out of this chair and said that she believed in Jesus and that people who didn’t believe in Jesus, they were going to go to hell. And I said, "The Lord Jesus said, 'Judge not lest ye be also judged,'" and the priest had to stop it, I was so embarrassed. I was so sorry. I was so sorry. . . . But it’s all right.

Later we were tidying up down in the basement, you know, getting ready for those rental people, and they had a magnificent piano, and I said, "Oh, it would be so nice"--she and I were doing this--"it would be so nice if we could have somebody play and they could sing," and she said, "The piano is out of tune." So I said, "Oh." She said, "At our church we tithe. And our piano is tuned." And I was so glad she wasn’t Catholic. I didn’t know what to do. . . . I like to think that I have outgrown all of that, but I wouldn’t want to have it tested.
APPENDIX B

The following is the text of a talk Elizabeth Kelly gave at Rockford Chapel, a Quaker meeting house on the Antioch College campus, on August 1, 1990.

Yes, the most helpful thing is just to realize that there's nothing here but matter, energy and vibration. The matter is the physical, visible universe. It exists within the energy and the energy is in everything. The scientists call it energy and the spiritually-minded call it God. It is beyond all comprehension, but we experience it in movement, in life. When it returns to the source the physical body or the physical plants, or whatever, are dead. It is energy, and how we relate to it transforms our daily life because as we become conscious of it our life is transformed. Dr. Jung said, you know, the whole thing here is becoming conscious. We become conscious in the morning when we go from being asleep to being awake, but for most of us it's still waking sleep.

Everything has a vibration. Human beings, because they can speak and they have thumbs, are the only living things that can change their vibration. They change it through
meditation or prayer or chanting or the Christian idea of making life an offering, with gratitude, so that you’re grateful you have something to do and you do it with gratitude as an awareness, participating. Human beings can change the environment for the same reason. We’re the only living things that can do that, because the thumb, of course, is a tool and [through] speaking you can get people to do the same thing.

The Buddhists, of course, believe that the universe is run by law, the law of gravity, [or] whatever. The Christians believe in good and evil. These are different attitudes toward the same thing. One is no better than the other. They’re different concepts. We will never have one religion because we’ll never have one person, one kind of person. Different religions suit different religious temperaments, and that is what they’re supposed to do. Your religion is your inner conviction of actually what is appropriate. Appropriate is what goes unnoticed. You don’t stand out; you’re just part of whatever’s happening. Due to the incredible stress of our society, without some spiritual discipline to balance it, we can all expect some periods of mental stress or neurosis. It’s very important to recognize that this is a very healthy way of dealing with a difficult situation. In fact, a neurosis can be a very helpful mental adjustment.

I think it’s very helpful to realize that we’re not
here to be tormented. The universe is benign. We experience that energy through love and gratitude because when we love someone, something means more to us than our own self, so we are beyond our ego. In gratitude, we’re conscious of what’s happening. These are both very remarkable states of mind.

It is difficult to love because it takes a certain amount of daring and a certain amount of inner security. People who have been severely tormented and abused have great difficulty having enough confidence in other people to do that. They’re waiting for blows. A friend of mine asked a wonderful psychiatrist who was here one time—he teaches at Harvard and he was writing his first book about child psychology. His name is Jerome Kagan. And she said to him, "Jerry, what do you think of people who are always very kind and considerate of other people?" And he said, "I can only be in the room with them for about fifteen minutes because I know what they have gone through to be like that." We don’t become gentle and kind and considerate because we think it’s a nice thing to do. We come to it out of our own suffering, which makes us aware that other people can suffer too, and we have a common unity. People who are very egotistical or selfish or into power—I always think, "Bless them, Lord, help them, help them," because the road ahead is all uphill.

And there is no escape. There isn’t any way to live so
that you will not have to come to difficult periods. St. John of the Cross called it "the dark night of the soul," when you feel that all you have done has really not added up to very much, or that people don’t appreciate you, or that you wonder why people live. [One must have] the inner conviction that life is valuable beyond comprehension, that to be here at all is an incredible privilege, that we are able to make progress here in ways that are not possible in other places. You can make incredible spiritual progress here. You make progress, actually, by giving up the idea that you know; that you know what people are thinking, or you know that people from that state are like that, or people with that much money are like that, or people with those kind of clothes are like that. If you can give all that up and just say, "I don’t know, I don’t know."

And your ethics really are your communion with the unconscious. It’s really all awareness. Freud said it’s all awareness; awareness of the self, awareness of the world and awareness of what’s in between. His recognition that there was something in between Dr. Arnold Toynbee said was the greatest contribution of the twentieth century. We know now that the conscious mind is not too dependable. Dr. Jung says that the unconscious is like a vast ocean and the conscious mind is like a little cork bouncing around, but, aha, the little cork knows it’s a little cork and that was the giant step forward, when we recognize that there are
different levels of consciousness.

In *Psychosynthesis*, Roberto Assagiolli has a drawing that’s very comprehensive, but I think if you can just realize that there are different levels of consciousness. Cosmic: we live and move and have our being in an enormous field of energy. Total awareness of that is called samadhi, cosmic consciousness, nirvana. The Tarot and numerology and astrology and all psychology are ways of verbalizing that energy. Dr. Jung defined it as all that we know and are not aware of in the moment. It isn’t something to be afraid of; it is where our creative ideas and our spontaneity and our imagination all function. Dr. Jung’s idea [was] that making the unconscious conscious is what people exist for.

The *Bhavagad-Gita* says people exist to experience the experience. See, you’re just in the moment; you’re with it. Not next week or two hours from now or whenever. The Buddhists have more sects than the Christians, which is hard to believe, but the Vietnam Buddhists had a priest who officiated at the peace treaty in Paris and spent a great deal of time in this country begging people to stop bombing his countrymen and one of his techniques that is enormously helpful is what he calls mindfulness. You’re supposed to spend one day a month in mindfulness. In mindfulness, you simply pay attention that you are awake and not asleep; and that you are sitting on the edge of the bed and that you can feel the floor under your toes and that you are getting
dressed and that you are bathing, or whatever, and you
maintain that, hopefully, for at least twelve hours. This
is almost impossible. But it is worth it. It will help you
to go from waking sleep into awareness. And one of the
fringe benefits is that you’ll be more with it. We spend an
enormous amount of time being physically present, you know,
and not really there. It is a great discipline to learn to
pay attention, and to realize that, whatever it is, it is
worth paying attention to. Most of the time we think that
whatever it is we’re thinking is a whole lot more
interesting or vital or important than whatever is going on.
This is why we’re so intrigued with Sherlock Holmes or
whatever. But if we were using just a small portion of our
brain we could do those things. We are really at a place
where we have to do what Ann Landers says, wake up and smell
the coffee. Part of spiritual awareness will do that.

If you think of human beings as icebergs: the physical
body and the conscious mind are what we’re aware of. What
runs everything is the bottom part. And thanks to Freud and
Jung and Adler we know this is true. It’s divided into
three parts; and we can think of it as id, ego superego or
mental, physical and spiritual, or parent, adult and child
or--the Hindus have always called it the gunas and they say
these are the doers. Sattva is compared to the sun
illumination; and rahas is compared to the energy of a
volcano; and tamas is compared to inertia, granite. At
different times in our life we need spontaneity. We never get to some great spiritual plateau where from then on we don’t have to pay attention to what we’re doing. Constant awareness of what’s going on will keep you happier than allowing yourself to get into emotional states.

Freud’s great contribution was that people were primarily emotional. And Adler’s contribution was that people were into power. There are people who would rather run things than anything else. You’ve met them. One is no better than another. And we get into one after the other, too, you know. And Dr. Jung’s great contribution was that there is an inner desire for something more. In The Man of La Mancha, you know, Don Quixote says, "I search for the bread that is not made of wheat"; the sustaining, nourishing life that really doesn’t have anything to do with what’s going on.

In our present time, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the great example of religion. In 1945, he had twenty thousand monasteries in Tibet. Today there are two hundred, and his people are scattered all over the globe. And there is some concern about how the little children will learn and whether his whole culture will persist because it is exquisitely refined and difficult and not easily assimilated. But the message of His Holiness is to be kind and compassionate. He says that whether or not you can believe in reincarnation, or life after death, or in any of those things, we do know
that being kind will make life better, and being compassionate makes life endurable. All His Holiness will say about the Chinese, who lined the paths to the privies with shattered altar stones and then accused the Tibetans with being unhygienic because they wouldn’t set foot on them, all His Holiness would say is that that is the way the world is; and that is what his father said. So there isn’t a lot of bashing of the Chinese or repetitions of their suffering.

It is vital to keep going. Our religion, whatever it is, is what makes daily life not only bearable, but actually joyous. We are here to be happy. Obviously we want to be happy; we don’t want to be miserable and we don’t want to suffer. So the big problem is how to be happy. And finally, you know, very often we get everything we want and we find that we’re just as miserable as we were before we got all that stuff. So what’s going to make us happy? The realization that one is willing to be happy is a giant step forward. Many people get into unhappiness like a child into a jam jar and they go day after day, "He hit me and nobody loves me and this is terrible and I don’t know what’s going to happen to the world, look at the paper; terrible, terrible; depression, depression." This is all true. But this has always been true. There has never been a time when everything was perfectly wonderful except--Mark Twain said, "Yes, there was a perfect man; his wife’s first husband"--
but otherwise, it's in your head that it's perfect, not in daily life.

But to make ourselves happy we have to come to some realization of truth and recognize, really, that there has to be a certain amount of mental, physical and spiritual discipline in the day for the life to be balanced. A life can be too mental, or too physical or too spiritual. The mental is served by study. As long as we live we should study something because from study we recognize what we do know and what we do not know. And so we're far less likely to make grandiose remarks about people that we've never laid eyes on or about what other people are thinking, or whatever, because we know we don't know. That is the great value of education. Disciplined exercise is the ideal. But actually, whatever the person will do with a certain amount of regularity and with the idea that in doing it we're participating with the universe in action. Yoga is the ideal, but whatever you can do. And the spiritual is served by meditation or prayer or chanting. The idea is to establish within your own life a certain ritual. There is no way to overestimate the power of ritual because it communicates to the unconscious, not the conscious, and it has a liberating effect that we can experience if we do it every day.

This is essentially a healing group, but it's helpful to have some idea of what's going on so that healing works.
Healing is the realization that you are connected to something beyond comprehension; that you have a body, but you are not that body; and you have a mind, but you’re not the mind; and you have feelings, but you’re not the feelings, and you have desires, but you’re not the desires. It is vital to go beyond these things in order to develop spiritual power. [A woman enters with two children, one of whom begins to cry.] Well, darling. How are you? Come on in, sweetheart. Come on, precious darling. Here, sweetheart, go get a chair. It will be all right. [The child continues to cry.] He’ll be all right. Of course, darling, of course. It’s all right, sweetheart. Yes, it’s fine, it’s just fine.

I think the most important thing is never to be discouraged and to know things will go well. [The child continues to cry.] It will be all right; it will be all right. [The child’s mother hands him some beads from her purse and this distracts him momentarily.] That’s why mothers have big bags. The Lord has a big bag too.

If you think of it as a divine energy that’s beyond comprehension but that is all knowing and--you can talk to it, you know. The thing that separates you is your own fear and doubt. Usually when we’re in dire straits, we say, "God, God, help us," and we have an immediate sense of being helped because we have not been diverted by our fears and anxieties. We have gone to the source and it is always
there. One time, in Cincinnati, my son was quite ill. I didn’t realize it and I gave him the car keys and it was a light snow. Cincinnati has dangerous streets. So we got on the bridge and the car went out of control and of course I was shouting, “God, God,” and my son was so mad, but it was like hands came down and took over the car. And we came up seventy-one with all those bridges and my friend in the back would say, “Ooh, another car just went off the road! Ooh, another car just went off the road!” And I was terrified and chanting and praying and praying. We finally pulled into the driveway and they leaped out like gazelles and I could hardly get out of the car. Prayer is the absolute conviction that things will go well. Not from the way it looks or anything else, but just your own realization that God is beyond all comprehension and can accomplish anything. And that realization is the basis of all spiritual healing.

You have to go beyond our idea of limitation and realize that you’re part of something that holds the universe together. And that you are a living part of it. And, you know, how dear are your hands and feet to you because they’re a living part of you? We are the hands and feet of that energy. Why we’re here I have no idea. But being here is vital. And each life is terribly important.

We see a difference in the great scientist and the retarded child. Every life is equally valuable. It’s doing
something that needs to be done. We see the homeless and
the people on drugs. It’s all the same. It isn’t more or
less or whatever. Every life; every life is valuable. And
when people come to that realization, you recognize that you
are loved and understood and cared for beyond comprehension.
And that realization overcomes humanity’s two great
problems: fear and desire. People who have been deeply into
drugs come to that realization and everything is
transformed. Saul on the road to Damascus. There isn’t any
way to define how that energy will appear. It is simply
there. And it is our willingness to realize it that is
transforming, that makes all the difference. We energize
that awareness when we refuse to be discouraged.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that we need that
inner strength, that realization, and it doesn’t have
anything to do with our positions or where we are or any
form of limitation. The desire to be happy is really the
recognition that we are able to make ourselves happy. We
can also make ourselves miserable. No one wants to make us
happy. We make ourselves happy. And we make ourselves
miserable too. And it is our realization that we are doing
it that is so transforming. As long as we believe that our
happiness comes from our possessions or from our food or
from the people around us or whatever condition, we are not
really living. We are really living when we are grateful
that we can walk and talk and see and hear and are not
suffering pain and are willing to participate in the moment, whatever's going on. If we allow ourselves to think, oh, if we won the lottery, or if our children stop crying, how wonderful life would be, that is a fantasy. It is only now. This is where things are. And we have to cope with what's actually happening. We can't wait for something to be the way we would like it to be.

But the important thing in your own life is to recognize that you make yourself happy. You can make yourself financially capable. You can make yourself accomplish whatever needs to be done. And how to do it; how to do it. The whole performance runs on love and gratitude. And I remember hearing this and thinking, "Well, it sounds good but I don't think it will work." But, I promise you. It works. In a world where things grow old and fall apart and don't live up to warranty, you can depend on it.

You practice gratitude that you can walk and talk and see and hear and are not suffering physical pain; that you have food, that you have shelter, so that when you're eating you think, "Thank God, thank God." When you're walking, you think,"Thank God, Thank God." When you have finances coming or going, you think, "Thank God." You don't think, "How am I going to pay the rent, how am I going to do this?" It will come. And I went through quite a period where it was a great discipline to just say, "It will be all right; it will be all right," because there wasn't too much physical
evidence. Nevertheless, I did have sense enough to realize that unswerving devotion, assiduous effort, and attention were the main thing. That was the main thing. And by doing this, to overcome fear and doubt and concentrate upon things going well. I don't think it will happen overnight, but it does happen in a very remarkable time and it does come about in ways that will astonish you.

It is essentially an attitude. You know, people would say, "I don't like your attitude." We don't realize the power, the power of an attitude and that the attitude comes from our own fears and anxieties and our perception of truth, which is not necessarily true, you know. It's just our particular viewpoint at that point, at that moment. So developing within yourself a confidence that has nothing to do with what's happening but that is a realization of truth is a spiritual discipline. Swami Sri Yukteswar says that even a small spiritual effort will transform the future.

A spiritual effort is, of course, some kind of discipline, something that you will willingly do. In my own life, of course, I chant, but if you just pray morning, noon and night, this is a powerful discipline. I promise you that it will work. If, when you open your eyes every morning, just thank the universe that you can walk and talk and see and hear and are not suffering physical pain. Most of the great religions require prayer at noon because the sun, the source of all physical life, is directly overhead.
And in prayer you knowingly connect with the universe. We all connect with the universe, but it is knowing, it is consciousness, that makes the difference. Dr. Jung says that there were millions of years when people were not conscious. So that to know that you’re sitting on a chair, that you’re in a place, that you know where you are, is a giant step forward.

At night after your other prayers you pray for the recently departed, anyone who has died in the past year. If you’re fortunate enough not to have lost anyone you can pray for the people in South Africa or the Middle East or heaven knows where. These are different levels of energy, and by repeating them day after day after day, the life becomes centered and you have an inner security that has nothing to do with what’s going on. It comes from discipline. If you think of yourself as a disciple, it’s a giant step forward of willingness to submit to something more. This is very difficult, particularly for Americans. We are not into that kind of thing. But it’s rewarding beyond belief because what happens is that you knowingly connect; and it isn’t your connection so much as what comes back to you that makes it so overwhelmingly rewarding.

What happens when you make these spiritual disciplines is that you connect with that unconscious and the rewards are beyond belief. In the first place you won’t get as tired. And in the second place, and I have seen this over
and over; I’ve visited convents and monasteries and ashrams many, many times. We have four sons. Our third son was a Benedictine monk for six years. There is something about spiritual discipline that keeps people young. In the monastery and convent you could not tell their age. Absolutely. And it isn’t due to face creams or Estee Lauder or any of that. You disconnect with that terrible anxiety and fear, and that does cause ageing; severe ageing. Just realize that you’re loved and understood and cared for and you can be like the little baby in the basket and just be there, or you can say, "I don’t like it, I don’t like it, I don’t like it." The more you will just be quiet and absorb and do what you can—If you can pay attention to what you’re doing so that you really know what you’re doing. If you know what you’re doing and why you’re doing it and you take full responsibility for what happens, you are in touch with the unconscious, and the great blessing is if you make a mistake you’ll never make it again. You’ve learned. You won’t develop an attitude if you know what you’re doing and why you’re doing it and take responsibility.

George Bernard Shaw said, you know, it’s a great blessing to know an eccentric. And that is the way eccentrics behave. They know what they’re doing and why they’re doing it and they expect to be responsible and so they usually act in a way that’s pretty far out for the rest of us. But, they know where they are. Many are overly
concerned about how they feel, or what other people are going to think or what would happen to us if they don’t like us. We are not doing what we want to do and we’re not doing it because we want to do it. We’re living in a world that doesn’t really exist. The only thing that really exists for us is our own self and our own feelings and what we can do.

And it is very helpful to realize that we are part of every human being. No one is separate. The fantasy of being separate is what the Hindus call \textit{maya}, desire, and what the Christians call evil. It means in daily life that anything we do where we feel separate, alone, deprived, cut off, will cause suffering and anguish, and anything we do with a sense of unity, with others, for others, because of others, will go well, because it is a realization of truth.

We don’t need a new religion; we need a new awareness of truth. After the Holocaust and the second World War, and the Korean War and Vietnam war, people have a terrible sense of insecurity. The only security in this life is our capacity to endure whatever happens. Many people think if they live in a certain place, or this person or that person loves them, or they have enough money in the bank, then they’ll be secure. But that attitude is giving to a person or a place or to something else what really belongs to God. And our awareness of that energy is transforming. We recognize it’s there when we realize that no matter what happens, it’s going to be all right, that it is functioning.
I think [it's important] to adopt the attitude that life is difficult. You know, in his marvelous book, *The Road Less Travelled*, Dr. Peck says, "Life is difficult." Once we accept that as the basic truth, then we can be happy because we're not suffering or because we're with people we enjoy or we have a roof over our head, or whatever. If we think that life *should* be happy, that people *should* love us, that everything *should* go well, and that no one *should* have problems, or no one *should* have illness or whatever, we're going to be very, very unhappy. And we'll be very, very unhappy all the time because all of these things are inevitable. Coping with them is what is transforming.

A woman came to see me in her eighties. She appeared to be remarkably well, but she said that she had physical problems. But she had had some severe hemorrhaging and she'd called the doctor and he just diagnosed over the phone and said, "Well, you must have cancer, cancer of the uterus." She said, "I'm not going to have cancer of the uterus." And he said, "Well, I'm afraid that's what you have whether you like it or not." But she was adamant. And she had a D. and C. and she did not have cancer of the uterus. The will is not so much a force, but it's an ability to decide, and to choose that we will have this or that. Many illnesses have a lot to do with the universe; they have a lot to do with people who are paid to take care
of us and all that sort of thing. Those illnesses are inevitable because they fit into an incredible pattern. But about seventy per cent of our illness does not fit into that, although it can be fatal and we should bear some responsibility.

Well, we'll do our meditation. . . .
APPENDIX C

Carol Shepherd McClain notes that visions are often a part of the recruitment to the healing role (McClain 137). As we discussed her spiritual path, Elizabeth Kelly often talked about supernatural or visionary experiences. In the following section I present excerpts from some of our conversations on these subjects.

RR: In your book you talk about when you were dying in a hospital in Cleveland.
EK: Oh yes, yes.
RR: Was that when you were a child?
EK: No, that was after I was married. I became very ill. I was in the hospital and I knew I was dying and it really didn’t matter. And there was an old battered bureau in front of the bed with a mirror over it and I was lying there and it was late at night and there was a girl in another bed and I knew that she was dying too and I thought, you know, it really didn’t matter. My life at that time was so unhappy.
RR: How old were you then?
EK: I was twenty-two.
RR: You’d just gotten married.
EK: Mmmhm. In the mirror—there was an arched window between; there were two beds and this huge arched window and I could see this figure in the window in the mirror. I didn’t see the figure directly; I saw it in the mirror and it was dark with a cowl, and it was holding a chalice and I knew that if I drank the chalice I would die, and it didn’t seem to matter. Then I realized that was me, and that I hadn’t done anything, and I sat up in bed and I said, “I’m going to have four sons,” and I became violently ill and all this poison poured out and the nurses came and everything and I recovered.

RR: How do you explain that?
EK: I think it touched my will. You know that marvellous Roberto Assagiolli talks about the will, activating the will.

RR: You mean the possibility of dying activated your will?
EK: No, the realization that I could die and I hadn’t done anything and that I was going to have four sons. I had not made any effort.

In the course of the interviews Elizabeth Kelly showed me a "dream mandala" she had drawn which had hung in an Ohio library exhibit in 1989. Pictured in the mandala are images from some of these experiences which she saw as turning points in her spiritual life. I asked her to describe these
as well as others I had read about in Spiritual Journey, or that she had described to me before and we had not recorded. The following, the story of the white owl, is one such example:

Oh yes, yes, yes. Well that was when I was well into doing my thing. I think it was before I really had very many people come. But a few people did come. But I was dusting or doing some kind of housework and I thought I saw that owl, and I went on doing it. At first I thought, my word, it looks like a big bird, and I thought, that’s so foolish; there couldn’t be a bird that big. And then I came back and I thought, isn’t that odd; it looks like a bird. But there couldn’t be a bird that big. And the third time I thought, it really does look like a bird. And I called Bob, and we went out and the bird flew toward us. Oh it was so wonderful.

Birds are very significant in my life. Before I had my first operation we had never had crows, never had crows. And they were, every morning, screaming and raving and carrying on out there, and I said to Bob--before that we had only carried health insurance for him, and I said to him, "I have to have health insurance," and two months later I was in the hospital.

RR: The crows told you.
EK: I know. Yeah.
RR: And what about the owl? What was the message?

EK: That everything would go well. It was like some incredible benediction. A white owl. And the wings were so--And it flew so slowly and with such grace and power, and the wind, the sound--even now it thrills me.

RR: What about the soldier in the basement?

EK: Oh that was when we, that’s when we lived in Springfield and it was in 1939, when the war first started. And it was a French soldier, and he sat there. He sat there for weeks. I felt so badly because I knew I couldn’t communicate with him and I had no idea if he knew I was there or not. I didn’t know whether he could see me or not. I could see him.

RR: Did he look like me sitting here, did he look transparent, or--

EK: No, he looked like you sitting there. I always prayed for him and everything.

RR: How long was he there?

EK: Oh, about two weeks. He had to make his own transition.

RR: Does that happen to you a lot where you see other beings?

EK: Well, the time I saw the tree of life. That really helped. That was when I kept talking to my neighbor and trying to help her, and that’s how I can tell the difference between a vision and something--with a vision, whether you open your eyes or close them you see the same thing. And that’s how you can tell. It was like--it wasn’t a tree, but
it was more like a tree than anything else. It was a pillar of blue and white light and out of it went many, many branches and on each branch there were different colors and I knew that those different colors were people. And they were on branches because of what they had been able to assimilate and learn. And they could move to different branches. I realized that we're here to learn, just participate.

As we looked at the mandala, I asked her to explain the image of the spotted dog:

Well, when my aunt was very ill, she stayed with us and I was in that play, The Madwoman, here in Yellow Springs. And I woke in the night--I had to go to the bathroom, and this dog was curled up. And I had a feeling it didn't want me to see it, but I reached down and touched it, just to be sure it was there, and it was spotted. I'd never seen a spotted dog before, I mean, spots. And I went to the bathroom and I came back and the dog was there and that was when I touched it. And in the morning the dog was gone. And it was [a] very snowy and stormy night. And I thought somebody had let the dog in, and so I said to them in the morning, who let the dog in? You know. And nobody, nobody had seen the dog. Nobody let the dog in. But I touched the dog. I know it was there.
RR: How did you interpret that?
EK: Well, I thought it was someone that cared a lot about me, and was trying to be very reinforcing. But at the time, from this distance in time, I think that’s what happened, but at the time I had no idea.

In a later interview, as I was exploring the influences of various traditions on her spiritual life, I asked her about Spiritualism and she gave this account of another vision she had as a child:

I think there are sounds that we don’t hear and things we don’t see and I think that reconciling oneself to death is very important and however people work that out is very good. And I think Spiritualism is one way for people to adjust. But I never could get into that. I think that basically--and it might have been my early Lutheran exposure to religion, but I like ritual and I like the security of religions that have roots and Spiritualism has always seemed to be a little eccentric.

RR: Have you ever been to a seance?
EK: No, no. My grandfather was very much into seances. He used to conduct them. And things did appear. And I remember one time when I was talking to him, this figure, white figure appeared. He couldn’t see it. Then he asked me so much about it it became tiresome, you know. I was
probably about ten, eight or nine, I guess.

RR: What was it?

EK: I think it was my mother's mother.

RR: Did it communicate with you?

EK: No, it just appeared. When my mother--before I was born, when my brother was a tiny baby, my mother visited her father and stepmother in Cleveland and she was lying in bed, nursing the baby, and this woman appeared and smiled and looked at the baby, and then she turned and left. And the stepmother saw just this part of her dress, disappearing, you know, I mean it was a long dress and [she] just saw her going out the door. My mother saw her standing there and smiling and the stepmother saw her leaving. But it was my mother's mother. She died when my mother was two. So my mother had never actually seen her. But she had the sense that it was a relative and it, you know, was somebody that was very happy to see her and the baby. And the stepmother actually saw a person leaving. It was pretty amazing. But my grandfather was very much into Spiritualism. She would have seen that about, my brother was four years older, so it would have been about 1908, because later, when she was visiting some relatives, they had the dress that she had seen.

One of the images in the mandala was of an Indian girl. I was familiar with this one, because she had told me the
story of the Indian girl the very first time I met her, during a reading. [Rather than repeat the story here, I refer the reader to Chapter 4, page 158, where the complete text is provided.]

In June of 1991 Liz wrote the following explanation of the images that appear in the mandala:

In my mandala I have incorporated the meaningful experiences of my spiritual life. I wanted to express the gossamer, fragile quality of intuition and its deep purposefulness. In the inner circle are the spotted dog, the little Indian girl, the tree of life and the white owl. These were signs that marked my way and kept me from discouragement. The outer circle, the Tibetans believe, represents consciousness. My beginning of a sense of reality came in a dream of snakes.

The flowers represent the happiness of life in walking, talking, seeing and hearing. The joyful moments we recognize more in retrospect. To be aware that we are alive and happy is one of the purposes of spiritual effort.


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324


