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Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story of Homelessness

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

by

Margaret A. Lovejoy

Doctor of Education

March 2014

University of St. Thomas Minnesota

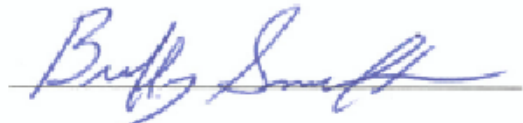
Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story of Homelessness

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approve it as adequate in scope and quality. We found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

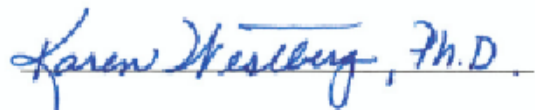
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March 17, 2014

Final Approval Date

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Abstract

Childhood memories are important for those who are caught in the confines of poverty and homelessness. This is a qualitative and phenomenological research study with a focus on the narratives of five African American women who were previously homeless. The first research question identified emerging themes. Five main themes were acknowledged: family interactions, education, abuse and violence, nutrition, and the effects of stability in childhood. The two part second research question referred to the negative power of systems that vilify and curtail transformative growth, as well as community input to solve issues of poverty and homelessness. The study was conducted in Saint Paul, Minnesota and four of the five women interviewed received social services from a local day shelter program. Each woman agreed to participate in a three hour-long interview. Data analysis of the interviews revealed that childhood issues carried through to later years. It was important for those interviewed to have the correct problem solving tools to overcome adversity. Usually poverty is defined as the lack of financial resources. It was found that in order to reduce homelessness, society has to broaden the definition to the inability of a person to find correct, current, and useful information that has the means to change their financial and emotional status. The common threads of homelessness and poverty identify the need for governmental entitlement changes. The scourge of poverty can be viewed from a perspective of a challenge that is both feasible and ultimately manageable.

Keywords: Childhood narratives, homeless African American women, phenomenological methodology, qualitative research

Dedication

Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story of Homelessness is dedicated to African American women who have experienced homelessness and continue to make a difference in their own lives, the lives of their children, and the lives of everyone in community.

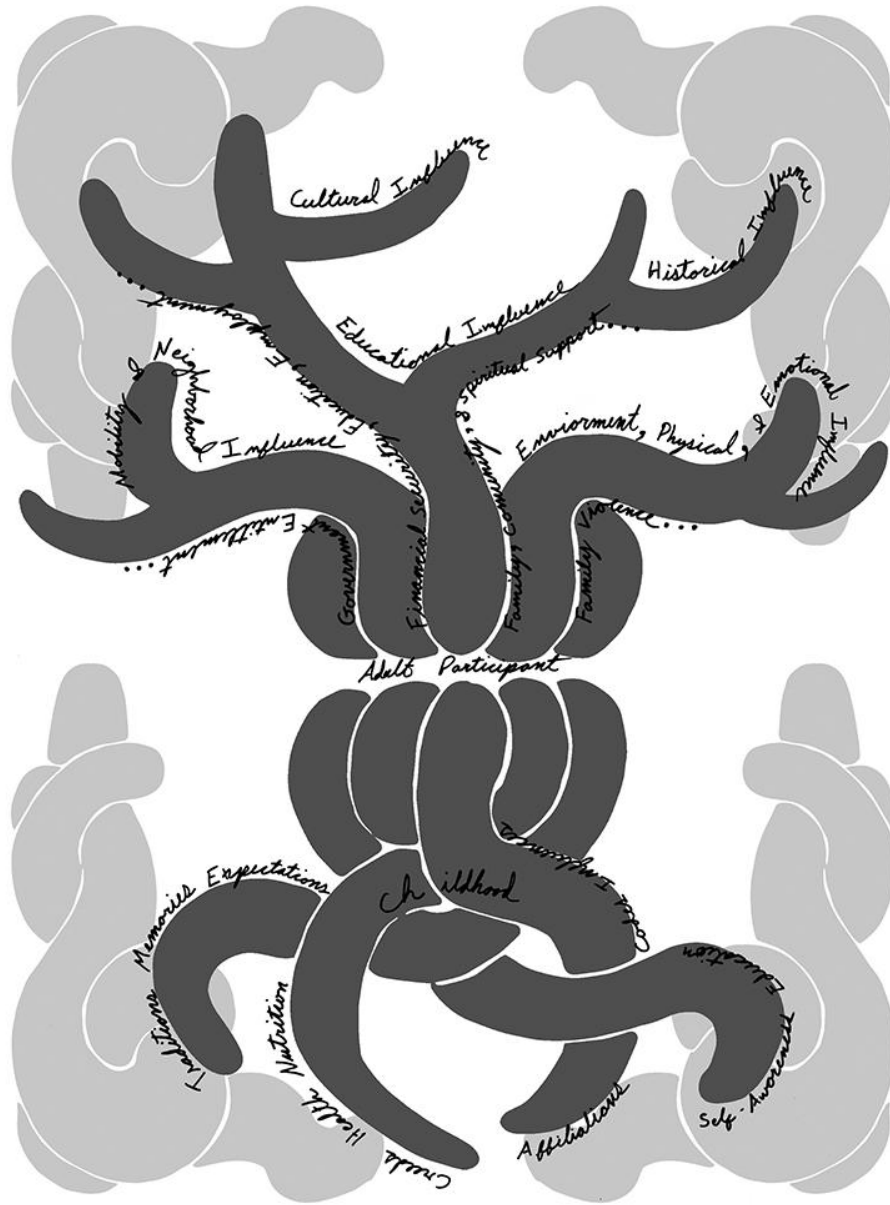
It takes a committed village dedicated to change and listening to story to raise a child.

–Margaret Lovejoy

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world;
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

Margaret Mead

Metaphor of Life



Artist: Rachael Elam Bonebright

Acknowledgements

We all do better when we all do better.

–Paul Wellstone

“Thank you” is sometimes just a phrase of courtesy. I have said thank you as an afterthought or words offered to fill the space of an awkward moment. As I complete the work on my studies and dissertation, the thank you I offer to those who are an important part of this process is not a trifling matter. At this time, the gratitude I feel is a heartfelt offering to the many generations of my fore-parents and the loving people who have been an important part of this process. For my family, because they hold an inviolate display of courage, love, undying fortitude, and strength. Their support is the reason I am able to express thankfulness for those who preceded me and those who have been walking with me.

My fore-parents passed on to me all the “right stuff” of gratitude and staying power. They are the reason I have a story to tell and the reason I find it necessary to listen and contemplate the stories of others.

Thank you to my parents, Gay and Leon Ponder, who implanted in me the potential to accomplish all that I wanted to accomplish. One Christmas, I received both a nurse’s kit and a doctor’s kit. It has been the inspiration of the doctor’s kit that inspired me as I worked to complete the studies for this doctoral studies program at the University of St. Thomas. Perhaps my parents were envisioning a medical degree instead of a doctor of letters for me; whatever the choice, we both acknowledged the importance of education in my life.

Thank you to my children: Timothy, Susanne, Charles, Annsara, and Jane. Thank you to my grandchildren: Marria, Donovan, Samuel, Sophia, and Parker. They were

always there as I explored the rigors of higher education. For thirty-two years, I have been encouraged and supported by my children. They have never asked me to stop going to school; indeed, they have never doubted my need to learn.

The professors and educators at St. Thomas have helped me find information and set me to doing tasks for which I had not a clue where or why they would fit in my life. In the end, all the knowledge they've shared with me has come full circle. For that I am fully appreciative of your honored role of educator.

Thank you to the thirty-two years of higher education educators who have opened the doors that helped me explore the challenges and gift of learning that only life and higher education can offer. Education has afforded me the gift of travel: meeting other people and cultures in their own environment, while learning and expanding my worldview. With Metropolitan State University and the University of Minnesota, I traveled abroad to study in Denmark; with United Theological Seminary, I participated in the International World Council of Churches Conclave in Zimbabwe (and had the privilege of hearing Nelson Mandela speak); with the University of St. Thomas, I traveled to South Africa to see first hand the hardships and positive outcomes of apartheid, the cruelty of township living and the natural beauty of South Africa. I will be forever indebted to higher education for these travel experiences.

I thank the women who agreed to be interviewed and share their stories with me. They are all strong beautiful women, who live in our community with a depth of integrity, insights, commitment, and hope for their lives and those they touch. It is amazing how their stories were all different and yet so many of their experiences grew

from similar incidents. It has been an honor to get to know the five wonderful women who unselfishly told their stories. I will be forever grateful.

For my peers and staff at The Family Place, thank you for listening and asking questions that sometimes were difficult to answer. Their inquiries sent me to find answers.

I thank my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Eleni Roulis and Committee members: Dr. Buffy Smith and Dr. Karen Westberg. I thank my friends, staff of The Family Place, my extended family, and Cohort 21 for their encouragement and support.

I thank God and the Holy Spirit for the energy, courage, and stamina to stay the course.

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Chapter One: Introduction

African American women who have experienced homelessness disclose childhood memories as they retell their stories. This shared information can be used as a tool to discover constructive community solutions to the underlying issues of poverty that lead to homelessness. *Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story of Homelessness* is a qualitative research project that researched the stories of five African American women's childhood, middle life, and current life. Their stories are vital to the health of the family and community. Their memories and current stories are compared to biographies of well-known and lesser-known individuals. History, stories, data, and messages can strengthen how we see our place in the family or in the community. In the asking and the telling of a personal story, strengths and character building attitudes are revealed. These characteristics have the ability to enable the family or the community to be better equipped to care for self and others.

The qualitative nature of this project has revealed common elements of personal stories that are present in all five of the women's narratives. But the common elements expose significant differences in outcomes that relate to their lives.

Research Questions

- What are the emerging themes from African American women who have experienced poverty and homelessness as they disclose childhood memories?
- Do the qualitative stories of homeless African American women validate the negative power of systems that vilify and curtail transformative growth and community health for solutions to poverty that alleviate homelessness?

Significance of the Study

Poverty and homelessness have ramifications that are deeply embedded in the messages that are received from the physical and emotional restrictive barriers of the environment. An under-used rationale for homelessness is poverty. While most define poverty as the lack of financial resources, I find that in order to reduce homelessness we have to broaden the definition to encompass the inability of a person to find correct, current, and useful information that has the means to change their financial and emotional status. Ralph da Costa Nunez, speaking to service providers at the Institute for Children Poverty and Homelessness (ICPH) conference in January 2012 said: “Homelessness is not the issue, it is poverty that needs to be cured.” The results of chronic poverty, neglect, abuse, and inadequate health care are all devastating for everyone, especially for children. These deficits of familial generational poverty interrupt the ability to thrive. The devastation can put this segment of people at risk of poor performance in their education. According to the Institute for Children and Poverty (2012), homeless children are nine times more likely to repeat a grade, four times more likely to drop out of school, and three times more likely to be placed in special education programs than their housed peers. These failures can follow through to adulthood, resulting in total economic breakdown and personal disempowerment, leading to any number of less productive paths. Gary Cunningham (2010) suggests:

It is our duty now to begin to lay the plans and determine the strategy for the winning of a lasting peace and the establishment of an American standard of living higher than ever before known. We cannot be content, no matter how high

that general standard of living may be, if some fraction of our people—whether it be one-third or one-fifth or one-tenth—is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and insecure. (para. 1)

The Maasai of Africa, upon entering a village, ask the question, “...and, how are the children?” If the children are well, that means the entire village is doing well. They are living in a positive environment. Too many families in our community (Ramsey County) are not living productive lives; they are suffering from the effects of poverty and poverty has an effect on the entire community. Children, who eventually grow into adulthood, may not thrive. Ultimately, poor performance affects the future work force, including lessening the number of people able to join the military to defend this country. Improper medical care is a predicament of poverty, resulting in a society with a significant population of people experiencing physical and mental health issues, which in turn equates to additional expenses for the already tottering health care system.

The significance of reflecting on childhood stories when adulthood is reached can have major implications on how a person defines themselves and how past experiences affect offspring. Past realities can affect how a parent raises a child and the child’s understanding of their adult role in community.

As the director of a social service agency, I have designed programs and services to help families discover their own avenues to stability. We hope to guide the heads of households in understanding how choices affect their lives and how to make positive and necessary changes that will enable the entire family to face challenges with a positive spirit. One of the messages of the agency includes helping adults to be more aware of barriers to success. It is difficult to change established mainline entitlement service

systems that are firmly in place; therefore, it is important for families seeking services to understand what to expect from the system and how to plan accordingly.

Why Should We Care?

Stories, data and messages strengthen how we see our place in the family or in the community. The saying “It takes a village” is overused. I contend it does take a *committed* village that is willing to support families in order raise successful children. That is why we care.

ICPH (2012) reported, “The stark reality is that Black Americans are greatly overrepresented in U.S. homelessness and poverty statistics when compared to whites.” In 2010, one out of every 141 Black family members stayed in a homeless shelter, a rate seven times higher when compared with persons in white families (one in 990). The brief, presented by ICPH, outlined some of the longstanding and interrelated social and structural issues that leave black families more likely to experience homelessness.

In Minnesota, the Wilder Research (2012) report on homelessness states that, as a result of poverty, homelessness has increased. The survey, performed every three years, counts the number of people homeless in Minnesota on any given night. The report states that there has been a significant overall increase in families living without permanent housing. The count does not represent the actual number of people in Minnesota who are considered homeless. In 2012, the last Wilder report, children and youth 21 years of age or younger constituted 46% of the homeless population. In 1991, the report found that children and their parents were the fastest growing segment of the homeless. In October of 2009, the study counted 1,435 homeless families with 3,251 children age 17 and

younger, up 19% from the previous study in 2006. Changes need to be orchestrated that demonstrate that we really care.

The Family Place

The Family Place, a social service program in Ramsey County, is in a position to see the issues of family homelessness on a daily basis. We see both the underlying causes and the effects of bureaucratic systems and services on families staying in the shelter system. Fifteen years ago, issues of homelessness were far removed from my personal conscience awareness. If I had been asked, I would probably have said that a homeless person is down on their luck and they need to pull themselves together. I would have blamed alcohol as the center of their issues and would have not considered mental health, ill-fated government solutions, or failing economics as the main culprits that underlined homelessness and poverty. Like most people who live comfortably in their lifestyles, I would have blamed the victim, rather than the system that controls and demonizes. I would not have ever considered children as a large portion of the homeless population.

To combat the issues of homelessness, those in the forefront must be passionate about understanding the issues and willing to work on advocating for change. Paying close attention to experiences of women who have been homeless can set in place the impetus for change to occur, for change is caring.

Symbolic Metaphor of the Tree

I have incorporated a symbolic metaphor for this dissertation by using the image of a tree to help chronicle the participants' stages of life and emotional development. Trees are important: they turn carbon dioxide into oxygen that helps us breathe; they reduce air pollution and prevent erosion; trees shelter and shade us from the hot sun;

wind and noise are blocked by trees; animals and other wildlife live in trees; they are beautiful.

I am a gardener. I value the life, seasonal cycles in nature, and the effects of outside influences. It does not matter if you are living rurally or in various urban settings—somehow trees are in all of our lives. The same situation occurs as I look at the issues of homelessness: it is around all of us, and there are many times in which we do not see it, but it is there. Nurturing and bountiful aquifers are needed to provide water to the life-giving roots of our children, to insure a healthy existence for the future. The flowing waters can be found in the messages that are being received throughout life.

In order for a tree to bloom or produce, it must have a healthy, well-established root system that encourages the development of a sturdy trunk that will support a healthy leafing system. Natural aquifers are needed to provide water to life-giving roots, ensuring a healthy existence for the future. Family members and community contacts in the story of life are the aquifers.

The women I interviewed have these strong root systems, and they are thriving. They are around us, yet we do not take notice of their existence.

Before the first of the three interviews with each woman, I explained the metaphor of the tree, and before each successive interview I explained the stage in which we would be discussing. The first interview was about participants' earliest memories, and I equated those years to the growing of the roots. In the second interview we talked about their middle years of life, or the growing tree trunk, and the third interview involved conversation about how they saw themselves currently in life, leafed out and supporting community. I also asked the women to talk about the issues of outside

influences that were affecting them. The tree metaphor worked well to help the women being interviewed to conceptualize how they related to that portion of their lives.

The growth and development of the tree as it related to their lives needed the flow of nurturing water, or family and community support. The women interviewed for this project care about themselves and their future. They have a vital story that should be told as a way to change the status quo, not just for themselves, but also for the communities in which they live. Their experiences are a valuable resource to address asset-based solutions to poverty leading us beyond the fairytale to the real story of homelessness.

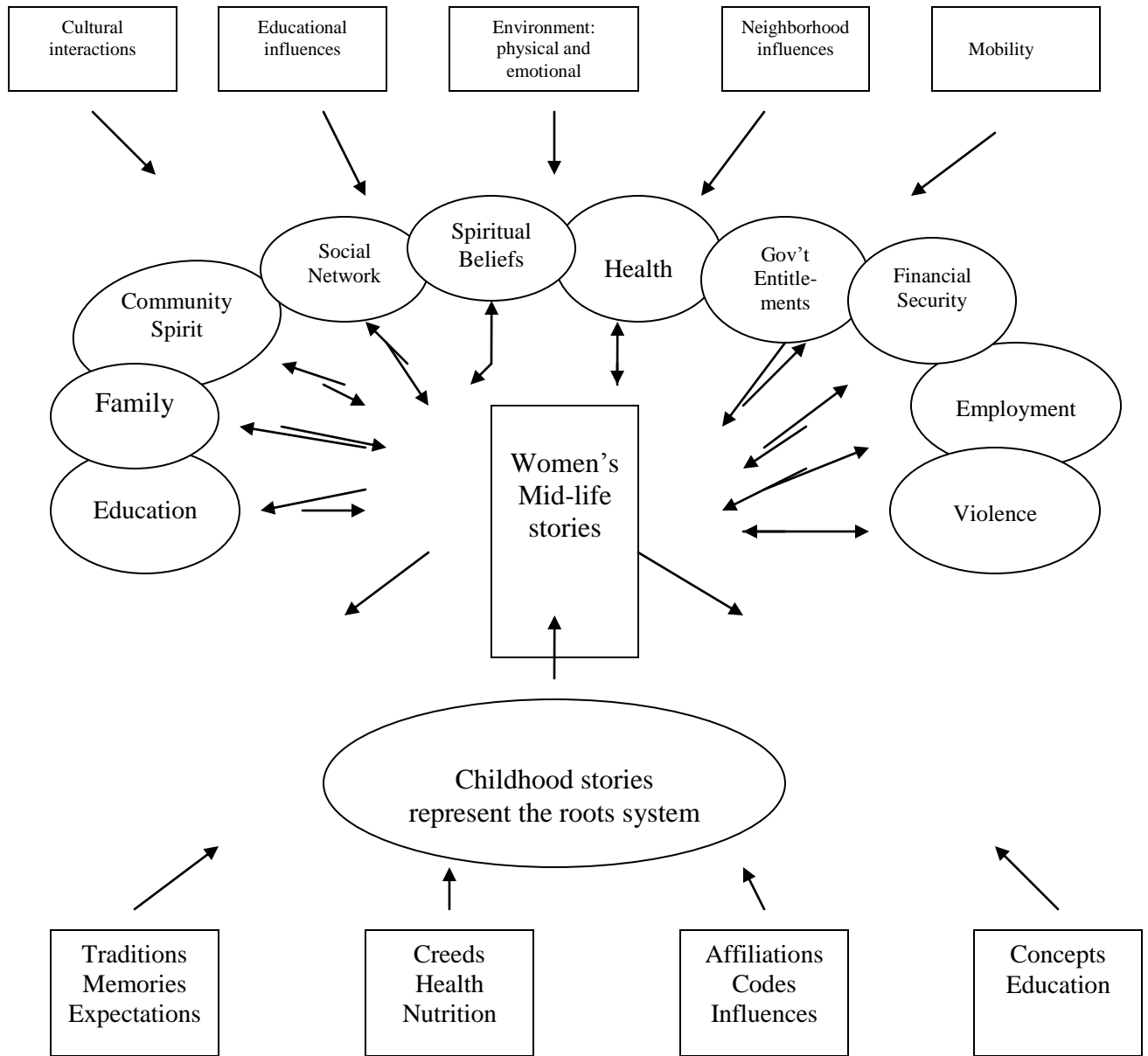


Figure 1. Symbolic Metaphor of the Tree

Both this graphic design and the artistic presentation earlier in this dissertation symbolize the tree as a metaphor for life. Artist Rachael Bonebright depicts the childhood as roots that are intertwined with each other. It is the roots of childhood that create the basic knowledge of expectations that are absorbed and transferred from the roots to the ample trunk of the tree.

The trunk represents mid life that seeks to recognize community connections and aspirations. Above the trunk is the current sphere of influence. Symbolized in both the graphic and artistic presentation as the visual reminder of the concerns that influence current day issues.

Personal Reflection

My first paper upon entering the doctoral program at the University of St. Thomas focused on African American Women's Clubs instituted during the turn of the 20th century. The mission of the clubs was to help establish links and better life choices for African American women migrating from the South. I am aware of the strength and determination with which African Americans always faced the injustices that have been meted out against their well-being by those who were considered the majority. Day after day, year after year, century after century, Black people and especially Black women have survived in the most hostile environments.

My question became: why have we, as Black women, survived indignities, humiliation, and physical and mental abuse? Where does the strength to survive adversity come from? I am Black; my ancestors suffered and survived, thus giving me life. Why? Where and how does the strength to overcome originate?

The Women's Clubs in the 1900's taught and shared with those escaping Southern brutality how to gain acceptance in the northern climes. African American women taught women to read, rear their children, and find employment. Women were at the forefront of helping other women survive.

In order to ensure survival, Southern women fed their families from their gardens. The move to the North changed eating habits, and mothers had to learn to shop in city markets and grocery stores. Southern women had spent days and years behind a team of plough horses; now, to survive, they were being hired as domestic servants.

As Black women continue to meet challenges, I had to ask myself: what are my struggles and how have I been aided? Who was at the forefront assisting my success? The answers were clear: my family, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors who cared about my achievements. I contemplated the childhood stories and memories that kept me on track. I began to wonder: what are the childhood stories of other African American women, especially, the memories of African American women who have been homeless? Have the stories and memories aided or hindered their life's journey?

I started asking women in shelter about their childhood memories. Of course, I received a plethora of unrelated situations, but I could visualize the rationale of how and why these stories and memories are intimately linked to success or failure.

Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story of Homelessness explores the existence and the common thread of *how* and *why* African American women who have been homeless found their own avenue and voices for success. It is also about how this success can and should be explored as the community tries to find methods to understand and solve the complex issues of homelessness.

Homelessness is well beyond the imagination of a fairytale. Disney and other writers would have us believe that fairytales have happy endings. The hero or heroine appears, the villain is defeated, and all is well, all is forgiven, and the prince and princess ride off into the sunset and instinctively we are to believe that utopia will continue. The

music score crescendos to fortissimo. The theater lights come on. Everyone goes home with a smile. That is the fairytale. There is always an end that leaves us elated.

In reality, families caught in the vise of homelessness and poverty must work especially hard to have a good outcome. Social services agencies have to be proponents of qualitatively assessing the needs of community. Funding sources, whether corporations or foundations, should set aside their need to view the issues from the practice of collecting quantitative data to react to the needs of the community. They must listen to what is being said by families in need of services.

In the thoughts of some Americans, the face of homelessness is well beyond their imagination. The bubble of comfort in which many live never seems to burst, while for others, it is never inflated—making the comforts of home a dream or a fallacy.

The late Paul Wellstone said, “We all do better when we all do better.” Because I have faith in the possibility of a fairytale ending, I believe that most want the best for the rest. We are the villagers, given the responsibility of ensuring the success of the children and a happy ending for all.

Langston Hughes’ (as cited in Gates & McKay, 1997) poem “Mother to Son” epitomizes the art, rationale, and reasoning of what a mother wants her son (or daughter) to know about life. It was written to encourage and emphasize that life is comprised of ups and downs. The translating of personal stories is contingent upon honesty with children, family members and the community.

Mother to Son

Well, son, I’ll tell you:

Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.

It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—

Bare.

But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.

So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.

Don't you fall now—

For I've still goin', honey,

I've still climbin',

And life for me ain't been no crystal stair. (p. 1254)

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Every day in America women and their families fall prey to homelessness. Reaching epidemic proportions, homelessness has far-reaching tentacles, affecting everyone in our nation. In an article from Good Works, the author believes that there is more than one reason why people become homeless, but poverty is a common thread. The article goes on to identify two types of poverty—situational or generational (<http://www.goodworks.net>).

Situational poverty is the easiest to address, whereas generational poverty can influence multiple generations, thereby creating a way of life or a skewed legacy. Unless broken, poverty persists simply as the *way of life*.

This literature review will delve into the writings and comments of authors who have digested and dissected facts, policies, and scenarios of poverty and homelessness, which have current day and deep historical roots. The review will cover six areas of investigation that relate to the emerging themes from the women interviewed. The six topics are:

1. How history relates to what is current and beyond
2. How entitlement programs work with and against those they are supposed to help
3. Discourse on poverty: What are the implications of poverty?
4. Education and leadership: Why it works and does not work in poverty
5. Research studies, both quantitative and qualitative
6. Relevant Literature: Biography and autobiography

How History Relates to what is Current and Beyond

This section explores historical trends and details that have led to situations of poverty and homelessness in the present day. In the words of Barbara Tuchman (1984),

A phenomenon noticeable throughout history regardless of place or period is the pursuit by governments of policies contrary to their own interests. Mankind, it seems, makes a poorer performance of government than of almost any other human activity. In this sphere, wisdom, which may be defined as the exercise of judgment acting on experience, common sense and available information, is less operative and more frustrated than it should be. Why do holders of high office so often act contrary to the way reason points and enlightened self-interest suggests? Why does intelligent mental process seem so often not to function? (p. 4)

African History

In historical African culture, storytelling was a ritual. A Griot (pronounced gree-oh) is a storyteller, a position of honor in the West African tradition. The Griot hands down important information to preserve the tradition and history of the community. The role of the Griot is to maintain the genealogies and oral traditions of the tribe. Similarly, this dissertation focuses on real life events of five African American women who participated in the telling of their stories. The “Griot’s” role has been modified, but the stories are still impressive. These women, like a Griot in African culture, can be utilized as carriers of truths that can ultimately lead to awareness and positive transformations for themselves and society.

It is important to comprehend the role of history that bridges the past to the present. This study locates the important place of personal stories from first memory to present experiences. The participants were willing to share their life stories and to remember the *past* with the outcomes of understanding the *present* as they prepare for the *future*. Dr. Julie Leanne Hammond (2006), in her thesis “Homelessness and the Postmodern Home: Narratives of Cultural Change,” says

One has only to read contemporary critical theory to become quite convinced of the importance of metaphors of homelessness to postmodern subjectivity.

Likewise, homelessness forms an important trope in all sorts of American public narratives, including journalism, literature and film. “Homelessness” is an increasingly marginal issue today precisely because it is also quintessential to postmodern experience.

Religious Traditions In History

Walter Trattner (1999), in his book *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, begins by sharing information about Jewish tradition taught through the Talmud, the five books of the Bible, and more broadly to all Jewish laws and traditions that were codified in A.D. 500. The Talmud was given to Moses in both written and oral forms. Jewish law that taught through the tradition asks and answers the question: How much should be given to a poor man? The answer generated by the question is he should have enough to sustain life with food, clothing, and household necessities.

Jesus taught the love of humankind from his traditional Jewish background. The stories of the loaves, fishes, and the feeding of five thousand people are recorded in the

books of Matthew (14:3-21), Mark (6:30-44), Luke (9:10-17), and John (6:1-15). The four accounts that are presented by the followers of Jesus say that the people marveled at the miracle. The message of the passage is meant to change the human heart. Those who had followed Jesus finally understood the need to love one another, and their hearts softened. They realized that in community it is crucial to care for one and all. Those who had heard the preaching of Jesus not only had their hearts opened, but they gave from their stash of food and shared what they had been saving for themselves. That is the justice approach to entitlement. Everyone in community has a right to the necessities of life; therefore, everyone has to give from what they have.

Walter Trattner (1999) tells us that as the church was emerging, the Christian practice of obtaining wealth was not the norm. Friends or relatives cared for community members who were experiencing poverty. Therefore, it was not necessary for the church to create an extensive process of providing social services. Changes became more prominent during the fourth century as Christians began to acquire more wealth, giving rise to the creation of class separation. The sixth century saw the creation of monastic traditions, with orders from church leadership, to assist the poor in rural areas.

For centuries, religious communities (monks and monasteries) were the center of giving to the poor and offered protection to those seeking alms. Changes started happening during the feudal period of history. During that time, feudal lords housed their workers (serfs), making it less necessary for religious communities to practice charity.

The Jewish tradition that brought forth Christian teachings were modified as the poor sought more relief, first through the church and later through Elizabethan laws of the 16th century, which brought into being the first legislation outlining the response

from the community to care for the poor. Elizabeth Segal (2010) writes that the poor were categorized as worthy or unworthy. The worthy were widows, orphans, the elderly, and those with disabilities. The unworthy were able-bodied adults and unmarried mothers (Segal, 2010). The poor became a burden on the financial structure. Those seeking prosperity were working towards personal improvements, while amassing wealth (Trattner, 1999). They thought of themselves as being outside of sharing their wealth.

Hammond (2006) wrote about the mitigating circumstances in the historical changes of homelessness in her dissertation:

Though the term “homeless” was sometimes used to describe the conditions effecting the very poor during the latter half of the 19th century, it was not used to describe a social category of people until a wave of unhoused people showed up in American cities in the 1980s. At this time, housing scholars and activists, responding to economic and social changes that forced a whole new population onto the streets, began to actively challenge stereotypes of “bag ladies,” “bums” and “transients” by redefining our understanding of poverty (Hopper and Hamberg 7). As sociologist Talmadge Wright puts it, with the term “homeless,” “segments of the very poor were successfully redefined as deserving, as victims of larger social-structural forces” (19). This narrative of homelessness was chosen by advocates, because it did indeed strike a universal chord. “Homelessness” has become a narrative inherent to capitalism, a narrative that both contradicts and enlivens our notions of democracy.

In the preface of Nell Irvin Painter’s (2006) book *Creating Black Americans*, she writes, “Contrary to what many people assume, history exists in two time frames: the past

and the present. It is tempting to conclude that what happened in the past is over and done with, utterly unchanging despite the passage of time” (p. iv). Reality is better understood by incorporating how the past affects present day and life experiences for future outcomes.

It is also tempting to presume that history books tell the absolute truth or factual accounts, but mostly the “reality” is from the writer’s perspective. This is the reason that this literature review will highlight points of history and the words and thoughts of a variety authors and storytellers, from the honored position of the Griot of West Africa to the modern day look at story through the lens of Nell Painter (2006), Howard Zinn (2003), Henry Louis Gates (2011), and others. *Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story of Homelessness* will tell *today’s* story of five African American women who were once caught up in the traumatic distress of homelessness.

The Griot’s honored position and role was to hold sacred the tribe’s genealogy and traditions. When there were no written traditions; the oral narratives for the tribes were highly protected for the benefit of future generations.

Slavery

Painter (2006) tells stories of history through art and by answering the questions that are important for today. She understands that narratives change over time. Both Howard Zinn (2003) in his book *A People’s History of the United States* and Ronald Takaki (1993) in *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* write accounts of history that focus on those who have been exploited and socially marginalized.

The stories of those in the minority are written for and by those who consider themselves the majority; conveying facts from positions of authority. The authors say the stories were tainted by egos (spun out of control) and white lies, blurring the truth at times beyond recognition of what really occurred. The subjects of such stories had no voice or say in the matter of writing their own history.

Four hundred years ago, slavery was an economically lucrative trade. Howard Zinn (2003) explains the triangular effects of the economy in the 1600's between Africa, the Americas, and European countries. Many storytellers explain the horrors of the slave trade. Henry Louis Gates (2011), in his book *Life Upon These Shores: Looking at African American History 1513 to 2008*, points out that during the course of slavery, 450,000 human beings, recognized only as cargo, were shipped to the new world of America and held in bondage until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. In spite of the real happenings or whoever the narrator was at the time, the story had a single subject matter/underlying theme: quantifying the effects of economics relating to the ever-so-profitable slave trade. Those in poverty, the enslaved, or indentured servants were all considered necessary for the improvement of the economy. Human beings were sold off to the highest bidder; maltreatment was legal and customary; families were separated; women were used as breeders; and all able bodies worked under deplorable, inhumane conditions until death. Southern plantation owners wholeheartedly believed that fear had to be used as a control mechanism for those who were enslaved.

The *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*, edited by Norman R. Yetman (1999), explains that after the Civil War and following the abolishment of slavery, the 14th and 15th Amendment “extended to former slaves [1]

equal protection under the law... and [2] guaranteed to them the right to vote” (p. 105) respectively. This posed many problems for Blacks, as whites were not ready to let go of the innate and addictive nature of dominance and power as it relates to enslaving African descendants. Yetman (1999) backs the statement with these pointed words:

...race relations continued to be based on a rigid caste system. The roles of African Americans after their emancipation became well defined and tightly circumscribed. ...Through intimidation, violence, lynching, and terrorism, African Americans were kept in a subordinate status and subjected to racial discrimination long after slavery had been legally abolished. (p. 105)

In the early 1800's, transporting Africans to America was stopped, and the threat of financial hardship loomed over the South, inciting the concept of enslavement to take on even more horrific procedures such as illegal transportation of Africans. The penalty to captains operating the illegal trade ships was so stiff that dumping the human “cargo” was more advantageous than risking getting caught.

The historical accounts that are most popular in schoolbooks describe Blacks as accepting of their plight of enslavement. Gates (2011) states, “American slave owners often justified slavery by claiming that as docile and intellectually inferior beings, Africans were well suited for enslavement” (p. 43). Opposing this view of history, Gates sites the bravery of Crispus Attucks, as he struggled for his freedom, and Richard Allen, who established the first African Methodist Church in Philadelphia for the freedom to gather and worship on their own terms. Painter (2006) says that Harriet Tubman was the Moses of her people. Tubman made nineteen trips to Maryland to free slaves. Plantation owners put up a bounty of forty thousand dollars for her capture. In today's value, that

would amount to approximately two million dollars. This is not a history of docile people accepting the brutality.

The Emancipation Proclamation was written to discontinue slavery. But the truth is that slavery did not end. It was simply cloaked in different circumstances, i.e., slavery morphed to Reconstruction, then to peonage or convict lease. Gates (2011) writes:

Some convicts described life under the convict release [system] as “worse than slavery.” Slaves, after all, represented a significant financial asset to their masters, who provided them with some basic necessities, if for no other reason, than to protect their investment. (p. 177)

Later, the creation of Jim Crow instigated the progress of separate but equal, igniting fuel to relegate the lives of Black people (Painter, 2006).

Norman R. Yetman (1999) contends that the Jim Crow period of history “was not simply a ‘natural’ result of ‘traditional’ relationships between Black and white; rather it was consciously created by whites to impose and maintain their political and economic power” (p. 106). In all of these historical malfeasances, there are immeasurable numbers of unshared stories of great significance to American society’s actual history.

Summation: How History Relates to what is Current and Beyond

There is a definite importance of rethinking and contemplating history as it relates to personal story. All cultures of people can personally equate to how the past affects present day circumstance that ultimately influence the future.

The Griots of West Africa transmitted tribal data that reminded the people of the past and the importance of the present. Today, as African Americans retell history, we are

reminded that the harshness of slavery is just as much about the brutality of slave-holders as it is about the separation of African families and the horrifically inhumane treatment of men, women, and children.

History is a personal narrative. Knowledge can prescribe outcomes. These shared stories give foundations to why circumstances evolved as they have. Personal accounts of story act as bridges between generations while locating the importance of place for oneself, family, and the community.

How Entitlement Programs Work With and Against Those They are Supposed to Help

Government entitlement services and programs become important players in the lives of many women who have been homeless. Laws, rulings, policies, programs, and a variety of services have been put in place that can either help or defeat the purpose of living an independent life.

Government and Entitlement Programs

Walter Trattner (1999) writes about the restrictive measures of historical government entitlement. He contends that it is possible to trace the United States' policy of entitlement programs back to the pre-biblical days and what was declared law, pertaining to the care of the poor. Long-lasting laws were written during the Elizabethan period of the 13th century. The laws clearly stated how and why the poor should be cared for. Some of the laws were written in order to preserve the best qualities of humanity, and others were written to preserve the wealth, land ownership, and status of the affluent.

To better understand the nature and power of government systems that drive the poor, four writers come to the perspective with history and ways in which the system does *not* deliver solutions to poverty. First, Elizabeth Segal (2010) has written a comprehensive introduction to social welfare policies to foster a better understanding of what drives policy and its affects on lives in her book *Social Welfare Policy and Social Programs: A Values Perspective*. Second, Joel Handler and Yeheskel Hasenfeld (1991), in *The Moral Construction of Poverty: Welfare Reform in America*, say, “The distinction between the ‘deserving’ poor and the ‘undeserving’ poor is a moral issue, it affirms the values of the dominant society by stigmatizing the outcasts” (p. 16). Third, Martin Gilens (2000) in *Why Americans Hate Welfare; Race, Media and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* says that for the most part Americans support the need to “fight poverty and homelessness to improve our nation’s education and health care, and to assist displaced workers and the elderly” (p. 12). However, when it comes to welfare itself, widespread support turns to widespread opposition. Lastly, Jill Quadagno’s (1994) *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War On Poverty* uncovers the root causes for the failure of the “American Dilemma” as it reconfigured, through welfare reform, the issue of racial disparities and inequalities in social, economic, and political institutions. All four authors paint the picture of an uphill battle for anyone who depends on the system for care.

Historically, the Poor Laws that Walter Trattner (1999) describes during the Elizabethan period are still reflected today by identifying who is deemed “worthy” of receiving public assistance. It is also true that there are stigmas and consequences that come from receiving assistance that can be life-long deterrents to personal change. The

conversation for this section of the literature review will center on those practices, how those participating in this dissertation study identify the effects of the social service policies, and how government guidelines affect their personal stories.

Martin Gilens (2000), in the introduction to his book *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* says, “Welfare bashing has been a popular staple of American politics.” Three previous presidents have not supported the system and called for changes. President Nixon said it has become a monstrous, consuming outrage that does not care for those it is supposed to protect, mainly the children. President Carter and President Clinton voiced similar concern. During President Reagan’s first term, critics pointed to homelessness as a discernible problematic issue in urban America. In the final weeks of his presidency, Reagan told *The New York Times* that the homeless “make it their own choice for staying out there” (Gilens, 2000, p.1).

Elected officials vilify the system of welfare because bashing welfare strikes a chord with the American people (Gilens, 2000). Gilens (2000) goes on to say that the perception of waste and inefficiency causes the public to think that those on welfare rolls are receiving too much in the way of food stamps and other services. (Currently, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) could be facing a nine billion dollar reduction in funding, because of that adherence to that same ideology). Gilens (2000) also notes that the concepts of the deserving and undeserving poor—a throwback to the Elizabethan Period—still exists in the minds of many Americans. “A much more popular view is that the cost of welfare is inflated by bloated welfare rolls filled with undeserving recipients” (p. 61).

Following Michel Foucault's (1977) theme in the book *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, he depicts how epidemics demand tactics in which discipline and power come into play. The "availability" of government assistance programs is a power tactic that is utilized for and against those experiencing homelessness. Foucault believes monthly grants, food subsidies, and medical assistance became insidious in the mid 50's and that aid programs became surveillance tactics that monitored those in poverty.

Piven and Cloward (1993) in *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* attest that racial tensions in the 50's and 60's were escalating in urban areas. In a move to squelch the tension, public assistance became more available to African American families living in poverty. There were other contributors to the growing public assistance roles, more migrations from southern cities to northern cities, and more disruptions in Black families; for example, fathers unable to find work left their families. Piven and Cloward (1993) attest that "Disorder [in the 60's] in turn, was a critical force in producing more liberal relief practices" (p. 193). Using the system is the way in which African Americans who have been exposed to homelessness have established methods to maintain the status quo that keeps their lives in flux. With generational poverty becoming a familiar lifestyle, i.e., multiple generations depending on government programs, the ability to stabilize centers on complying with entitlement mandates became impossible. But entitlement programs demand a Foucaultian type of order that ensnares and ensures compliance and possibly curtails the development of the women's stories.

Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) in their book *The Phenomenology of Everyday Life* quote European naturalist Jacob von Uexkull, who invites readers to

imagine blowing a bubble that will enclose each creature that represents its own world. The bubble will be filled with personal perceptions that we, as the viewer, would not be able to see or understand. That is the world and oftentimes the perceptions of African American women living in poverty. Too often, the world's co-inhabitants undervalue stories from the marginalized population; they look into the bubble but do not attempt to understand the individual's plight.

Ruth Sidel (1996) in *Keeping Women and Children Last* writes how America targets single mothers receiving government assistance as pawns by the political system. They are also stigmatized because of the role of being the female-head of the family. She writes:

They [single mothers] are despised, denigrated, ostracized from mainstream society. In earlier times, they were known as the “dangerous classes.” Today they are labeled, the “underclass.” They are pictured as virtually irredeemable, lazy, dependent, living off the hard-earned money of others. (p. 1)

This is a method of social control that diverts attention from the severe problems that Americans in poverty face. Sidel (1996) brings to light the real victims of poverty: the millions of children who will ultimately grow up and suffer from societal neglect, inferior education, inadequate health care, hunger, and homelessness. These are similar issues that Myrdal (1942) presented forty years before Sidel (1996) about Blacks in America in his book *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Sidel (1996) centers on the failure of our entitlement services for all persons in poverty. She considers the current population of all who are living in poverty, the majority of whom are women and children. Gunnar Myrdal (1942) locates the Negro problem in the minds

and actions of White Americans. Race relations in 1944 were on the minds of all Americans, but few had the heart to talk or construct solutions to create better race relations (p. 30). Indeed, the main virtue of *An American Dilemma* lies in its demonstration of how the mechanism of prejudice operates to disguise the moral conflict in the minds of Whites produced by the clash on the social level between the American Creed and anti-Negro practices.

This truth telling by Myrdal (1942) ties into the stories recited by the women of this study. They have experienced conflict through today's entitlement services. In a preface written in 1962, Myrdal says, "...The Negro problem is intertwined with all other social, economic, political, and cultural problems" (1942, p. xxiii). In Myrdal's obituary, written in the *New York Times* in 1987, it says:

In recent years he freely confessed to errors in *American Dilemma*: It had underestimated the degree of bias in the North; it had predicted that unions would support Negro rights; it had failed to forecast the civil-rights upheaval in the South. He said he could not have foreseen the way technology would drive Blacks from the farms and squeeze them out of factories, nor that the country would have permitted its cities to decay while whites fled to the suburbs ("Gunnar Myrdal, analyst of race crisis, dies", 1987, para. 29).

When Mimi Abramovitz (1996) writes about the historical aspects of feminization and how it is viewed, she takes into account the prospect of poverty and how feminization is explored and exploited politically. As she was gathering research information and when the book was published in 1996, the majority of the women for my research project were coming of age and seeking the assistance of social service

entitlement programs. I know from the data collected through interviews; the majority of those I interviewed are the second generation of welfare (AFDC) recipients.

Abramovitz (1996) adds a quote from Johnnie Tillmon regarding welfare that dramatically identifies the issues of the system from a poor woman's perspective. It says:

[Welfare is]...a supersexist marriage. You trade in "a" man for "the" man. But you can't divorce him if he treats you bad. He can divorce you of course, cut you off any time he wants. But in that case "he" keeps the kids, not you! "The" Man runs everything. In ordinary marriage, sex is supposed to be for your husband. On AFDC you're not supposed to have sex at all. You give up control over your body. It's a condition of aid..."The" man, the welfare system, controls your money. He tells you what to buy and what not to buy, where to buy it, and how much things cost. If things—rent, for instance—really costs more than he says they do, it's too bad for you. (p. 313)

This defines how the system of caring "uncares" for those seeking services. Abramovitz (1996) writes that the system was designed in modern day terms that include the factors of how families seeking services show how they emulate the norm. "As a dominant social norm, the family ethic articulates the terms of women's work and family roles. According to its rules, proper women marry and have children while being supported by and subordinated to a male breadwinner" (Abramovitz, 1996, p. 3). According to the writing and theology of Tillmon, the rules of ethics have been over laid by entitlement programs in which, "a" man (father or husband) is replaced by "the" man; the unseen male in the entitlement system.

Migration of Families

Anne Meis Knupfer (1996) explored the woman's clubs of Chicago at the turn of the 20th century and their response to social welfare needs of the migrating population. Those migrating to northern cities had very little knowledge of city living. In the past—when government services for the poor did not exist—people helping people was the only way to survive. African American women's clubs in Chicago at the turn of the 20th century were the first branch of community social work and education assisting African Americans as they migrated north seeking a better life. “From 1890 to 1920 the economic, political and social lives of African Americans in Chicago underwent tremendous transformations” (Knupfer, 1996, p. 30). Young men and women leaving their families left behind family support. Women's clubs' “other mothering” was invaluable for the new arrivals. “The club women rekindled this tradition of ‘other mothering’ in their founding of ‘other homes’ for children and youth, including kindergartens, day nurseries, settlements, orphanages, and homes for young working girls” (Knupfer, 1996, p. 13). Additionally, “Working in conjunction with local churches, businesses, and urban chapters of national organizations, African American women participated in numerous education and social uplift activities” (Knupfer, 1996, p. 2).

Isabel Wilkerson (2010) examines the migration of families exiting the south from 1915 to 1970. Wilkerson, a well-known ethnographer, states that historians would refer to this movement of people as the largest underreported story of our time. The migration still exists today, especially for poor families seeking a better way of life.

Norman Yetman (1999) in *Majority and Minority: Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life* includes additional data about the migration that also informs

the reader about how the African American population changed from living in rural areas to urban settings. This modern day movement of families mirrors the historical migration out of the South. The five women who participated in this study *all* moved to Minnesota for that same reason; they too wanted a better way of living for their families.

Donna Haig Friedman (2000) is a professor at the University of Massachusetts. She quotes Martin Luther King: “A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies” (p. 233). Friedman, (2000) asks the question: Is revolution the only way for a family to obtain support from the system? In her book, *Parenting In Public: Family Shelter and Public Assistance* she contends, “Parents who are poor, in particular single female parents, have always been held to a higher parenting standard in the United States” (Friedman, 2000, p.3). The greater society in charge of doling out funding wants to make sure the categories of deserving and un-deserving are adhered to by the strictest standard. How can the revolution take shape when those on the receiving end need what those on the giving end have to give? When there is limited housing, how are families expected to feel safe in participating in or starting a revolution?

Jill Quadagno (1994), in *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*, explains that available housing was restricted to families in poverty because of the ratio of rent to income. She says this reflects the government’s “retreat from its commitment to housing the poor” (p. 114). But what increased is a version of Michel Foucault’s (1997) concept of the panopticon. Foucault writes that even though the panopticon was created to check the spread of a plague in Europe, the concept is alive and used to keep “plague” of poverty in check. Foucault’s (1997) tactics of surveillance

are seen by Tillmon as she describes the obsessive policies and practices of “The Man” via social services. Again, we see panopticism in shelter situations noted by Friedman (2000), as parental practices are scrutinized and judgments dispensed by shelter staff. “In short, shelter staff has complete access to the texture of families’ lives, their goals, and their vulnerabilities” (Friedman, 2000, p. 21).

Ruth Sidel (1996) shows how America, in its search for a post-Cold War enemy, has turned inward to target single mothers on welfare and how politicians have stigmatized female-headed families both as a method of scapegoating, using social control and to divert attention from the severe problems that Americans face. She reveals the real victims of poverty—the millions of children who suffer from societal neglect, inferior education, inadequate health care, hunger, and homelessness.

Poverty is fast growing, devouring more people daily. The United States is the richest industrialized nation in the world. The fall issue of *Uncensored*, a magazine distributed by the Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness (ICPH), states that in 2013, fifty million people lived in poverty. Another fifty million are near poor, meaning they are just a few steps away from poverty. Those two categories comprise nearly a third of the US population. We, as a community and a nation, are not insuring that a safety net will be there for those in need. We can do better.

Comparing Sidel and the other social service authors and researchers the outcomes are paired equally to those structuring care in the early religious traditions. The historical lens for social welfare has not changed; still, categories are established and groups are aided or denied full inclusion of care.

Sidel (1996) reports that with the control of aid programs, single mothers raising their children were always looked at unsympathetically. Aid to Dependent Children (AFDC) has become a government program that has replaced the major breadwinner, deems single mothers harshly with controls that stultify.

Summation: Entitlement Programs

The authors and social science researchers have invested in, investigated, and have written page upon page of information about entitlement programs, i.e., how they work and do not work for those they are intended to assist. Even though entitlement systems portray their role as giving aid to improve living standards, more likely than not that aid confines the receiver to live within set guidelines that may not adhere to their ability to stabilize.

Tilmon uses an analogy to describe the situation of many families facing poverty. In an interview with Mimi Abramovitz, she cleverly and insightfully defines the difference between “a” man (a husband or partner) and “the” man, (a government entitlement program or systems provider). A man shares her life, whereas “the” man defines who she is as a person and how she is to live in that life.

Too often in the lives of those seeking services “the” man becomes the panoptic invader with the need to know and the power to undermine movement that would change poverty to stability—a change that would create an entitlement free life and the ability to provide for the family.

Discourse on Poverty

The input from authors who look at poverty and homelessness from the perspective of more individualized stories bring a valued viewpoint to the importance of story.

Sidel (1998), in *Keeping Women and Children Last*, says says:

ADC is being decimated and other programs that serve the poor are threatened by cutbacks, the litany of criticism against poor single women is relentless. Mother-only families are blamed for virtually all of the ills afflicting American society. Out-of-wedlock births have been blamed for the “breakdown of the family,” for the crime rate, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty, illiteracy, homelessness, poor school performance and the rending of the social fabric. (p. 4)

Women who have experienced homelessness understand, at a base level, the unfairness that is heaped upon them because they are poor. Government systems and social welfare services have a predilection to perpetuate instability and the accompanying dysfunctional affects that ensue.

More than a century ago, the National Association for Colored Women was founded by African American women leaders in response to a vicious attack on the character of African-American women. A few decades distant from the abolition of slavery, the intensification of poverty, discrimination, and segregation compelled these women to action in defense of their race. Their motto was “Lifting as We Climb,”

signaling their understanding that no individual woman of color could rise, nor did they want to rise, without the improvement of the entire race. At the top of their agenda were job training, wage equity, and childcare: issues that, if addressed, would lift all women and all people of color. (http://www.neweconomicsforwomen.org/media/lifting_as_we_climb.pdf spring 2010).

Abramovitz (1996) reports that with the control of aid programs, single mothers raising their children were always looked at unsympathetically. “AFDC [Aid to Dependent Children] substituted itself for the male breadwinner, judged female-headed households harshly, and subjected them to strict control” (p. 313). She writes that there is a historical process of feminization of poverty and political issues that explores the needs of males while continuing to include women in the same foray without the understanding that female issues of poverty are different from those of males. She goes on to say “This scathing stereotyping and stigmatizing of poor mothers has severe consequences for them, their children and for the society as a whole.” She also quotes sociologist Erving Goffman:

By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents. (as cited in Abramovitz, 1996, p. 5)

Donna Friedman’s (2000) *Parenting In Public* believes that parents who are poor, in particular single female parents, have always been held to a higher parenting standard in the United States than have those with higher incomes. Surveillance of the parenting

behaviors of those with low incomes is possible because of these families' unavoidable reliance upon a public assistance program that have been riddled from inception with stigmatization of its beneficiaries .

Jill Quadagno (1996) in *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* says the root causes for the failure of the “American Dilemma,” as it is reconfigured through welfare reform, is the issue of racial disparities and inequalities in social, economic and political institutions. Families in poverty are often given a taste of a better life, but then they discover that there are major fault lines webbing through the dream. Entitlement services habitually dangle an enticing carrot. Social Security established in the 1930s made it possible for those in poverty to have a retirement income. Many stages of improvement followed. Quadagno says “The Great Society provided one great gift for the elderly” (p.158)—an improvement that provided webbing for the dream.

However, by the 1950s and with the establishment of a new social service called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), that seemingly protective web of a safety net was suddenly transformed into a debilitating cocoon with restrictions that led to the breakdown of the family. Men had to be systematically excluded from the family if women were to receive the aid. Women were not encouraged to seek employment as long as they received the handouts, thus stunting their innate desire to work. Social Security distributed costs and benefits unevenly. Rather than transferring income from rich to poor, it transferred income from African Americans to whites and from working women to homemakers.

I paraphrase Langston Hughes' poem *Raisin in the Sun* by asking: What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up or explode?

Quadagno (1996) retells the story of a St. Louis family, who, through a new housing program, was able to move out of Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri. Before signing the mortgage, the house ostensibly looked good. But under the fresh paint and wallpaper were insurmountable defects. The house was infested with rats. The furnace was in disrepair; by the second winter, the furnace did not work at all. Their granddaughter died of pneumonia in a cold second floor bedroom. Similar stories plagued the neighborhood. Unable to refurbish the homes, new homeowners simply left the properties. Looters and vandals invaded and, ultimately, most of the houses were demolished. These American dreams were dashed by federal programs that claimed that they were there to help (Quadagno, 1996). Does the web remain intact or blow away?

Michael Elliot (1993), in his book *Why the Homeless Don't Have Homes and What to Do About It*, personalizes the account of how he worked with homeless. He encapsulates a broader perspective on the importance of working with those who are disenfranchised and why the work is so vital. As America has sought to respond to poverty, Elliot saw men sleeping on subway grates, women dining out of dumpsters, and children sleeping in cars. The answer to the dilemma was simply to find homes for those in need, he thought. But then he writes, "As the decade [1980] drew to a close, however, it became apparent that housing alone was not the answer" (p. xii).

Joel Handler and Yehsekel Hasenfeld (1991) write that the distinction between the "deserving" poor and the "undeserving" poor is a moral issue, it affirms the values of

the dominant society by stigmatizing the outcasts” (p. 16). In regards to race and poverty, Handler and Hasenfeld (1991) add:

The single mother and her children are not only poor; they are also disproportionately members of a minority or ethnic group. Gender, class, race and ethnicity evoke powerful meanings in American society; they feed into and make more complicated the moral construction of poverty and welfare policy. (p. 17)

George Lakoff, (2002) identifies his profession as cognitive science; that is, he studies how people conceptualize the world. In his book *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, Lakoff explains the differences in thinking regarding social services between that of the conservatives and liberals. He sites that liberals think of social services as investments, and conservatives look at the services as coddling people. The two concepts regarding services are polarized.

Liberals also see many social programs as functioning to promote fairness. They see certain people and groups of people as “disadvantaged.” For historical, social, or health reasons, which are not faults of their own, such people have been prevented from being able to compete fairly in pursuit of their self-interest.

Racism, sexism, poverty, the lack of education, and homophobia are seen not only as barriers to empathy and nurturance, but also as barriers to the free pursuits of self-interest and self-development by disadvantaged individuals and groups. For liberals, it is the job of government to “level the playing field” for the disadvantaged. (Lakoff, 2002, p. 182)

The conservative’s model Lakoff explains as:

...social program amount to coddling people—spoiling them. Instead of having to learn to fend for themselves, people can depend on the public dole. This makes them morally weak, removing the need for self-discipline and will power. Such moral weakness is a form of immorality. And so, conservatives see social programs as immoral, affirmative action included. (p. 181)

Bruce Lincoln (1989) writes in *Discourse and the Construction of Society Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* about the power of myth: even though poverty and homelessness are not myths, so often the negative issues that are foisted upon people who have fewer resources are then seen in the general public as the idea that all people without resources will behave in a certain way. It is easier to classify “all” people rather than looking at each person as an individual. Lincoln contends there are multiple ways a community can implement sociopolitical change vis the use of myth. In this case it is the women’s stories that can change the myth that political systems firmly sustain. They can contest what is currently in use or invest in history to create novel social forms or re-interpret the established myth.

Summation: Discourse on Poverty

The story and discussion regarding poverty is encased in having an understanding about your own personal narrative. When others who think they have the power to speak for those in poverty often demonstrate a misleading and incomplete scenario. Both historical authors Zinn (2003) and Takaki (1993) refer to this revelation in their overview of history. Goffman writes that those with the pen in hand will construct stigma theory to

explain why people in poverty are inferior. Faults are blown out of proportion by contrived circumstances that seem to be believable.

In many cases of poverty stricken families, it matters not how much they work to achieve change, the power of the stigma stays intact. Lincoln says it is easier, for systems to pigeonhole “all” people in a certain classification as having similar behaviors. Too often the opposing camps, hunker down and defy solutions, leaving those seeking services in the lurch. With this type of thinking, and inability to move forward, the significance of individual stories are not included in the solution to poverty.

Education and Leadership

Maxine Green (1988), *The Dialectic of Freedom*, writes:

Autonomy, many believe, is a prime characteristic of the educated person. To be autonomous is to be self-directed and responsible; it is to be capable of acting in accord with internalized norms and principles; it is to be insightful enough to know and understand one’s impulses, one’s motives, and the influences of one’s past. (p. 118)

Knowing of self is a reason to keep sacred the memories of childhood.

Education Combating Poverty

The outside influential modifiers of the participants have shaped or continue to shape life’s circumstantial events, so that they are able to progress to a better place.

Educational experiences that occurred in childhood can cause major conflicts in adult life. The outcomes can be positive or viewed as a challenging achievement. bell hooks (1994), in her book *Teaching to Transgress*, relates the joy of going to an all Black

Southern school. With the advent of school desegregation and the displacement of African American teachers came the disappointment of gaining knowledge only for information. Outside influences changed how and why she learned. Some of the same emotional feelings can also center on employment practices; working hard to make a better life for yourself/family and being stymied by unfair employment practices. History can unwittingly control behavior. Historical effects of slavery and the aftermath of being Black in America have caused emotional turbulence with lasting effects of generalized internal oppression. Most African American children have not heard stories of how and why family members left the South. Stories of the Great Migration that unfold in an epic ethnographic account in Isabelle Wilkerson's, (2010), book *The Warmth of Other Suns*, is an almost untold phenomenon of millions of African Americans who left the south from 1900 to 1950. They left in search of a better life—much like the families I meet in shelter today.

In order to accomplish change, there must be passion. For families experiencing poverty and homelessness, change is present, but only in negative terms. Poverty is more than lack of financial resources; it has a strong propensity to exclude information that helps individuals to grow beyond their present condition. Poverty aims to reject the passion of possibility. Poverty is the result of an oppressive system usurping power. The educational system has a lethargic blockage that stymies progressive education. In Maxine Greene's (2009) *In Search of a Critical Pedagogy*, she writes:

We want to encourage education for the children to be successful, but the system of reformed education relegates the children as “human resources” for the expansion of productivity, as means to the end of maintaining our nation's

economic competitiveness and military primacy. Of course, we want to empower the young; for meaningful work. We want to nurture the achievement of diverse literacy, but the world we inhabit is palpably deficient: there are unwarranted inequities, shattered communities, unfulfilled lives. (p. 85)

Empowerment is the crux for change. Education and training are the foundational stones for change.

Paulo Freire (2003) says teachers do the talking and students are filled with content that is detached from their reality. It is a plus for children coming from poverty to see the other side of the community; but, when do children of the oppressors see the reality of the oppressed? Freire (2003) goes on to say “the outstanding characteristics of this narrative education, then is the sonority of words, not their transforming power” (p. 71). The sound education being attempted fills space. It does not transform and it cannot penetrate the culture of silence.

Education and success of youth today who are impoverished or homeless stands in a precarious balance. John Dewey’s (1938) *Experience and Education* advocates from a historical perspective. He analyzes how traditional and progressive education *should* work. Writing a concise statement about education, he insists that education prepare youth for the future. Geoffrey Canada (1995), a progressive educator from the Harlem Zone in New York City, in his book, *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*, explains that we cannot expect to make changes until the child and the family receive massive services. Education goes hand in hand with employment, financial security, and issues of insecurities. These all play an important role in assuring stability or avenues that can become the harbinger of instability. Successful children are a combination of family strength, the education

system, and community resources. Children and families who are making a difference in community are in leadership roles that reflect their spheres of influence. They may not be or aspire to be top political figures, but they have leadership skills that are appreciated in their communities.

In regards to leadership, Stephen Preskill and Stephen Brookfield (2009) wrote that leadership is a practice of being open. They say that an “openness is the willingness to entertain a variety of alternative perspectives, be receptive to contributions from everyone, regardless of previous attainment or current status, and create dialogic open spaces” (p. 21). It is the open spaces by which the women I interviewed could then identify. They realize the importance of being a part of family. They want their children to understand the potency and promise of working together.

Karen Baker-Fletcher (1998), in her book *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, intertwines the love and strength she received from her extended family with her walk of faith. Faith was an important aspect in the lives of the participants in this study. They thought about connections of their past with that of the present and how they perceived their interactions in the future. Baker-Fletcher (1998) talks about the importance of the physical and emotional gifts given to her by maternal and paternal grandparents. She writes, “...each child, each human being has the potential to fulfill some of the best dreams of our ancestors” (p.16). We have already read how and why the women’s clubs at the turn of the century abetted the lives of new migrants to northern cities. Anne Meis-Knupfer (1996) shared details of how African American women worked together to make changes happen. I assert that the inheritance of ancestral strength of the women interviewed is still active in their lives today.

Interactive measures of government entitlement services, social service programs, and systems have become integral in the lives of people in poverty. That relationship can become unhealthy for the recipient. Piven and Cloward (1993), in *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, indicate that social rules may be broken, because those who are supposed to conform to what is given to them are no longer able to live under the bridle of the constraints. “Social rules lose saliency; to acknowledge their legitimacy is to impute moral validity to abstractions” (p. 228).

In this same vein, violence, broadly defined, can be an emotional or a physical clash between people who are related (or unrelated) or subjected to unhealthy outcomes by systems that stymie growth. Jana Jainski (2001), a contributor to *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*, says, “Social learning theory is one of the most popular explanatory frameworks for violence against women, suggesting that individuals learn how to behave through both experience of and exposure to violence” (p. 6). Violence could be experienced in the vast arena of available entitlement services, as entrapment that excludes development.

Violence is explained in textbooks, studied in everyday life, or portrayed in novels, but rarely do personal stories make the airwaves. Alice Walker’s (1985) *The Color Purple* and Barbara Kingsolver’s (1998) *The Poisonwood Bible* underscore violence. Violence is characterized by the withholding of affection or personal property. This is a part of violence that is continually misunderstood by the women I have met in shelter. They reflect on the physical attacks, but seldom do they voice the emotional brutality that has occurred in their lives. The family in *The Poisonwood Bible* is subjected to violence; they are sandwiched between a dedicated family member and a loving God,

which begs the question: How can God be placed in the milieu of violence? Walker (1985) displays the multiple ways in which her protagonist, as a child, is not only denied love, but also experiences physical abuse.

Summation: Education and Leadership

Intellectually cognizant as a community, we should seriously take seriously the words of prominent educator John Dewey who championed the preparation of our youth for the future: “Education is not preparation for life: education is life itself.” It is a simple statement written for students of prior generations, but still steeped in myriad possibilities. The words have multiple interpretations that can be misconstrued as negative or positive for today’s learners. I am sure Dewey was referring to textbook education. Today, youth can participate in a variety of formal and informal educational undertakings. They can be systematically lured by the penal pipeline (which is both an education and a future) or into the use of illicit drugs, prostitution, or fed into obesity with all the respective negative health issues.

Educated parents can guide their children into a positive, well-informed way of life. Jeffrey Canada realized, many years ago, that only educating the child will not lead to success. The entire family must be involved in the learning process in order for one to reach full potential.

I resonant with Green when she states the importance of knowing and understanding personal motives, impulses, and the influence of the past, which to me relates to knowing your own narrative—the ultimate, positive grounding tool.

Quantitative Research Studies

Quantitative data answers the questions of “how much?” and “how many?”.

Statistics express numbers. In Minnesota, the Amherst Wilder Foundation is a leader in this arena, keeping track of how many families in the state are living without a home. Every three years, they conduct a statewide study. In October of 2012, the latest study, they counted 10, 214 homeless adults, youth and children. This is a 6% increase over the 2009 study. Below are several quantitative studies regarding homelessness.

Wilder Report

The study reports:

Initial findings show that nearly half (46%) of all homeless people are age 21 and younger, of which 3,546 were children with their parents. The one-day study also counted 1,151 youth on their own, including 146 youth age 17 and younger and 1,005 age 18 through 21. Most of the increase was in the number of people using emergency shelters, which was up 27% from 2009. (Wilder Research, 2012)

Additional findings include:

- Young people are most at risk for homelessness. Children and youth age 21 and younger make up 46% of Minnesota’s homeless population. According to the census, they make up just 30% of its overall population.
- There was a slight increase (4%) in the total number of families experiencing homelessness, but a 22% increase in the number of two parent homeless families.

- Older adults had the largest percent increase in homelessness since 2009. Statewide, 777 homeless adults age 55 and older were counted in the 2012 study, up from 526 in 2009, a 48% increase. However, adults age 55 and older represent only 8% of the homeless population and 26% of Minnesota's total population.
- In greater Minnesota, the number of people found outside the shelter system increased while the number in the Twin Cities area was down. Greater Minnesota also saw an increase in homeless families not using shelter and a near doubling of the number of homeless adults age 55 and older.

Increases in the metro area occurred almost exclusively in emergency shelters, including a 44% increase in the number of children in emergency shelters. (Wilder Research, 2012).

To many readers, these are simply arbitrary numbers spewed to fill a void on paper. However, to me they represent the women and children that come to me for help. These numbers symbolize the women I interviewed; it is their past, hopefully, not their future.

National Coalition for the Homeless

Reasons for homelessness. The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) gives answers as to why people are homeless. They report that two trends have become apparent as the main culprits: 1) shortage of affordable rental housing, and 2) an increase in poverty. Below is the list and explanation of the contributing factors to homelessness according to NCH.

1. Foreclosure
2. Poverty

- a. Eroding work opportunities
- b. Decline in Public Assistance
- c. Housing

Foreclosure. Foreclosures due to recession were on the rise, with a 32% increase between April 2008 and April 2009. During that time the US saw a loss of six million jobs, which increased the unemployment rate to 9.4%. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimated 40% of low-income families faced eviction at time because of loss of income and foreclosure.

Poverty. Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked often making it almost impossible for poor people to pay for housing, food, childcare, health care, and education. Limited resources make dealing with choices even more difficult. The ever-increasing housing costs take a high percentage of the income, and, if you are poor, you are essentially an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets. Statistics indicate that in 2007, 12.5% of the U.S. population (or 37 million people) lived in poverty. Children are overrepresented, composing 35.7% of people in poverty. Two main issues directed toward poverty are: eroding employment opportunities for large segments of the workforce and the declining value and availability of public assistance.

Eroding work opportunities. Various reasons for homelessness persist. Included are stagnant or falling incomes, failing job security, and fewer benefits. Those depending on lower paying employment have been left behind as the disparity between rich and poor has grown.

Declining wages have put housing out of reach for many workers: in every state, more than the minimum wage is required to afford a one- or two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent.

The connection between impoverished workers and homelessness can be seen in homeless shelters, many of which house significant numbers of full-time wage earners. With unemployment rates remaining high, jobs are hard to find in the current economy. Even if people can find work, this does not automatically provide an escape from poverty.

Decline in public assistance. There is an inability of public assistance to keep pace with poverty. The declining value and availability of government programs has become a primary source of increasing poverty and homelessness. In August 1996, the largest cash assistance program for poor families with children was the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which was repealed and replaced with the block grant program called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

In 2005, TANF helped a third of the children that AFDC helped reach above the 50% poverty line. Unfortunately, TANF has not been able to kept up with inflation. In 2006-2008, TANF caseload has continued to decline while food stamp caseloads have increased.

Currently children of female-headed households are more directly affected by ineffective government assistance programs and face extreme poverty This phenomenon can be traced directly to the declining number of children lifted above one-half of the poverty line by government cash assistance for the poor. The underlining issues are a

result of loss of benefits, low wages, and unstable employment, many families leaving welfare struggle to get medical care, food, and housing.

Most states have not replaced the old welfare system with an alternative that enables families and individuals to obtain above-poverty employment and to sustain themselves when work is not available or possible.

Housing. The lack of affordable housing and the limited scale of housing assistance programs have contributed to the current housing crisis. From 1980 to 2003 there has been less support from government programs. Within that time frame more than 200,000 rental units have been destroyed. Renting for the poor is usually the only viable options for low income people.

The lack of affordable housing has lead to high rent burdens that absorb more than the recommended one third of income directed to housing. Poor families are often living in overcrowded, and substandard housing. These phenomena have not only forced many families into homelessness, but have put a large and growing number of people at risk of becoming homeless.

Needless to say, the need for housing programs clearly exceeds the supply. Of families seeking assistance, only about one third received a housing allowance or subsidy from federal, state, or a local government. Assistance in paying for housing makes a difference in whether a family is homeless or precariously housed. In St. Paul (Ramsey County) the waiting list for Section 8 Vouchers is five years. Locally families in shelter may face a three to four month wait for subsidized housing.

Summation: Quantitative Research

Quantitative reports give us important information; however, they do not provide a personal account of *why* poverty, homelessness, addiction, violence, or eroding employment happenings exist or how these issues have become endemic for certain groups of the American population. Quantitative information can obliterate the narrative.

The quantitative picture allows for mass interruption of significant findings. Quantitative data separates the heart-felt tugs, while qualitative data adds to the tapestry of what really happens to individuals who are counted in the data.

Both forms of data are needed, but too often as a community we depend on numbers to shield us from the pain of the narrative. A great number of people within the same society are purposefully shielded from facts such as: there are a growing number of homeless children; crimes are becoming increasingly more violent; a startling number of Americans are under the influence of some mood altering substance, with heroin fast becoming the street drug of choice. These important data affects us. It is our right to know, so that we can take action. Stifling the narrative curtails our positive growth.

For families to understand their place in community and or who they are as a parent, a strongly broadcasted narrative and truthful storytelling must be held safe and inviolate.

Relevant Literature via Biography and Autobiography: Examples of Other People's Narratives

Biographies and autobiographies are a viable source of learning about childhood memories in reference to the foundational aspects of maturation and emotional growth. Listening and valuing childhood stories and memories of those interviewed and

understanding the emerging themes that are salient in regard to fostering future capabilities can make it possible to find solutions to the issues of administering programs and services to those seeking assistance.

I have chosen to illustrate commonalities and differences of three important historical figures: Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X and Sojourner Truth. They each have profound life narratives that emulate the analogy of the tree illustration of my dissertation. With or without viable, strong parenting, they found caring and insightful community members that identify with John Shoup's book: *A Collective Biography of Twelve World-Class Leaders*, (2005). All three leaders had formal and informal education; patrons who cared for their welfare; critics and adversaries; apprenticeships and success; and a favorable fate (2005). From these highly acclaimed and published narratives, there is a common thread of courage, fortitude, and the will to do better for others. I identify the same commonalities and values in the "ordinary" women I interviewed.

Personal influences of the family, community and social networks, and the spiritual support that is garnered from institutions of faith *all* support the possibility of engaging the spirit of success. Successful outcomes can be found in biographies and autobiographies—they can be prime examples of how positive results are possible from the seemingly impossible.

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela's (1995) autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* recounts the importance of a positive childhood and the relationship to adulthood. His compassion

was clearly formed by a solid foundation. He was groomed to listen to members of his tribe. Tom Lodge's opening statement in his book *Mandela: A Critical Life*, (2006) says: "In the world into which Nelson Mandela was born in 1918, children were best seen not heard." He quotes Mandela: "Education we received by simply sitting silently when our elders talked" (p. 1). Following the biography to the end, Lodge identifies leadership from two points of difference: one the charismatic leader and the other Mandela's style of moral authority:

Leaders who command moral authority achieve their position through action and behavior, through appearing constant to a widely shared cause, through undertaking actions that are similarly perceived to advance their cause, through exemplifying the values that they represent in their behaviour, and finally by the use of language and symbols that animate their followers and reach across political boundaries. (Lodge, 2006, p. 224)

He was valued as a child, fought to achieve education, was belied in his mid-adult life as an instigator of corruption, then praised and admired as a genuine leader—the President of South Africa—in his later years. The fortitude that carried him through his life stages was fostered in his childhood and through ambitious aspirations that were expected of him. John Shoup (2005) in *A Collective Biography of Twelve World-Class Leaders: A Study on Developing Exemplary Leaders* says that leadership is subjective and people want and need good leaders.

Yet, if you put fifty people in a room to discuss good leadership, you would end up with fifty variations on what makes a leader good. Mandela was a definite systems changer and a powerful leader who will forever be missed and revered.

Malcolm X

Malcolm X (1964), in his book, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, was told to writer Alex Haley. It retells his struggles from an impoverished childhood to a passionate leader in the Muslim community and a controversial figure of the Civil Rights Movement.

Akin to some of the women interviewed, Malcolm's father was killed when he was seven. His mother was then committed to a mental health institution for her entire life. In the introduction of the book, writer Haley describes Malcolm as a black panther. He writes: "The black panther is an aristocrat in the animal kingdom. He is beautiful. He is dangerous. As a man Malcolm X had the physical bearing and the inner self-confidence of a born aristocrat" (1964, p. xxv).

Throughout the book Malcolm X explains how he found the courage to change how he lived his life. From orphan to two-bit gambler, still much of his strength emanated from the perils of childhood and youth. Yet, thinking back to the fifty people in the room that Shoup referred to in the 60's, there were large debates whether Malcolm X was a leader or rabble-rouser.

Malcolm's public display of what change could happen in the 60's was not a popular belief. His passion to subdue the oppressor divided the African American community. Malcolm wrote in his autobiography:

I must be honest. Negroes—Afro-Americans—showed no inclination to rush to the United Nations and demand justice for themselves here in America. I really

had known in advance that they wouldn't. The American white man has so thoroughly brainwashed the Black man to see himself as only a domestic "civil right" problem that it will probably take longer than I live before the Negro sees the struggle of the American Black man as international (1964, p. 371).

Malcolm's form of changing the status quo with violence was counter to wanting peace in minds of those following the Martin Luther King's methods. Yet, in the struggle for civil rights, violence emanating from the oppressor was common. The horrors of those in opposition to the Civil Rights Movement involved the use of dogs, fire hoses, and the burning and bombing of homes and Black churches. The autobiography relates to how Malcolm wanted to address change for a system that fought to remain unchanged.

Sojourner Truth

Author, Nell Painter (1996), in the biography of *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*, tells of her early years of being enslaved and finding the courage to remake her life into that of life-long public presence demonstrating the strength and power of a Black woman. This was not an easy task since Truth, born into slavery and named Isabella, lived under the guise of slave mentality. Painter (1996) lists those characteristics as:

...a lack of self-confidence, personal autonomy, and independent thought, a sense of one's own insignificance in comparison to others, a desire to please the powerful at any cost and, finally, a ferocious anger that is often turned inward but can surge into frightening outbursts--are precisely the traits of vulnerable people who have been battered. (p.17)

By miracles of happenstance Truth overcame these life-long obstacles to become an antislavery spokesperson. Writing an essay for the edited book *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History*, Painter says:

Sojourner Truth's deeds were three-fold: she had been an enslaved worker an experience she called upon regularly to authenticate her views; she was an inspired, moving preacher with a style that combined the power of her Africa heritage and the rhetoric of Second Great Awakening evangelism; and she was a forceful advocate for the rights of blacks (enslaved and emancipated) and women (black and white). In an era of the self-made man, Sojourner Truth, the poor, uneducated former slave, created the persona of the prophet (1996, p. 362).

In today's language she could be considered a renaissance woman; even though she lacked a formal education, she was well versed in the Bible and current events that pertained to the political sway of slavery. Truth wanted more for herself so she had to find ways to rescue those enslaved to enable her to feel good about her place in the community.

Summation: Relevant Literature via Biography and Autobiography

The women interviewed, in parallel to Mandela, Malcolm X, and Truth, were able to successfully untangle themselves—physically, if necessary, and emotionally (more importantly)—from unhealthy circumstances. Certainly, this is another reason to understand the history and your own story of transmitting yourself to a better place. We read from published stories how courage and fortitude facilitate change. I hope these and

other virtues will emerge from the interviews with the five non-ordinary, ordinary women who have been homeless.

Conclusions

The prescription for success lies in the gift and spirit of hope. If we look at the fabled literature of Jack and the Beanstalk, the mother, in good faith, sent Jack to the market with their last source of income, the cow. She envisioned that if Jack sold the cow for a decent price, they would be able to live for many months. Hers was a short-term goal. Jack, meeting the inspirational or perhaps the devious peddler, bought the story of the magic beans and sold the cow. He looked toward the future and gambled on the story of hope for a long-term solution to the issue of abject poverty, which he and his mother were experiencing. Jack was thinking futuristically as he gambled everything.

Imagine the fury, sorrow, and pain of both the mother and Jack when he returned home. Her emotions most likely stemmed from her lack of hope that a few beans could sustain any kind of livable future. She did not buy into the story of the magic beans. Jack was pained because his mother doubted his ability to plan for their future.

Families in poverty have been told the story of the “magic” assistance they will receive, but time after time they are disappointed. The beans did not produce a positive change for their lives. Services that were offered as hope for their future end up being smoke and mirrors. They often lack the ability to hope, but through listening to their stories, I have learned that they place a great deal of value in their children’s future. They never lose hope for the children.

The purpose of the literature review is to read the works of authors who have studied issues of poverty and how homelessness affects people in our community who are living in poverty. I reviewed literature with a focus on the messages and stories that women have received in childhood from their family, the community, and/or educational systems. The data reveals their stories. Through memory, they are connected to current information that links them emotionally and/or financially to entitlement programs that can influence their ability to stabilize their lives.

The African American community in Ramsey County constitutes 10% of the population, but comprises 80% of the population in the shelter system. The issues of poverty encapsulate more than being poor; they affect the outlook on life and placement of self in community.

This study asks women to relate their memories of received data and ideas from their childhood that have the power to illuminate the instabilities they face because of systems that cease to understand the fragility and nature of poverty.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story of Homelessness is a holistic and ecological approach to unraveling life stories of five African American women who have been homeless. Traditionally, triangulation has been the most effective method of validating the collection of qualitative information. However, I found the concept of crystallization to be more effective in my approach to research that includes: factual information also with the power delivered in autobiographies, biographies, fiction, and poetry. Crystallizing validation enables me to be more flexible in the discovery process as I research and present the lived experiences of the participants. This methodology provides the freedom to break out of the confining triangular approach using multiple imaginative avenues for validation. To validate the research methods with the approach of the crystallization concept, Creswell (2013), relating to the metaphorical image of a crystal, quotes Richardson and St. Pierre by saying triangulation is “rigid, fixed, two dimensional,” whereas

Crystals grow, change and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prism that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of response... (p. 249).

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are:

- What are the emerging themes from African American women who have experienced poverty and homelessness as they disclose childhood memories?
- Do the qualitative stories of homeless African American women validate the negative power of systems that vilify and curtail transformative growth and community health for solutions to poverty that alleviate homelessness?

Methodological Approach

In this process, utilizing the research questions as the guide, I have been able to describe and analyze the meaning of the participant's individual experiences, stated by Marshall and Rossman (2011) in *Designing Qualitative Research* as the phenomenological approach. "Phenomenological approaches seek to explore, describe and analyze the meaning of individual lived experiences; how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it remember it, make sense of it and talk about it with others" (p. 19).

Adhering to the phenomenological approach I have included longer, uninterrupted interview dialogs that resemble soliloquies. I feel it would be a disservice to the impact of the shared information to insert my understanding or clarification of points that were so graciously shared with me. Embedded in the longer quotes is a portrait of the power and personal methods that display the energy, resolve, fortitude and success of those interviewed.

The impact of the uninterrupted description can be more recently seen in the current process of "embedding reporters" with troops. The real story is witnessed on tape and dialog is unnecessary. The term embedded became the popular when the U.S.

engaged in military action in Iraq and Afghanistan. Media presentations became the power for information exchange.

Biblical parables offer a phenomenological approach as they relate to the teachings of Jesus. The stories of Jesus living with his people reveal his impact on community and his lived experience. The story of the loaves and the fishes revealed Jesus as a teacher. He told those in his company (and continues to tell Christian today) that they should care for each other. I exegesis the story as a time when those with fish and loaves of bread, hidden under their garments, opened their robes and gave freely from their secured larder. It is a story of community caring for all of its members.

The Griots maintained the history for the people of West Africa by remembering and telling stories. In the Middle Ages, the troubadours traveled from village to village sharing stories, and telling the news from other cities, with the main goal of entertaining and passing on information.

The invention of the Gutenberg Press squelched some of the power of the storytellers with the printed word. Now we are deluged with story and information; first the radio, then television, and the newest catalyst to the personal narrative is modern day technology. Conversation and personal accounts of the importance of narratives take a back seat to the hype of modern media. *Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story of Homelessness* hopes to prevail over current day media practices of quick fixes with the phenomenological and crystallization approaches that add depth and accountability to understanding the effects of homelessness and poverty.

The women interviewed freely shared their life stories with me, trusting that I would not conceal the intent of their lives by inserting my objectives or lived

experiences. It is vitally important in this discourse that their voices be heard as much as possible.

For this study, however, there is a natural link between the narrative and the phenomenological approach. The research involves in-depth interviews with African American women who have been homeless. I have known the five women for several years: four participated in the programs of the social service program I direct. The fifth woman I meet in a community-organizing workshop sponsored by Wilder Research. I have been involved with issues of homelessness for 16 years. In that time, I have gained an understanding and the opportunity to be privy to the deeper issues of poverty and living without a home. In that capacity as a social service provider, the phenomenological approach is more appropriate for this study.

An underlying approach for this dissertation is the potential to develop models that will enhance community awareness for the value of African American women's stories (narratives) and how they may be able to rectify some of the ills that hold its victims in the struggle to bring stability into their lives. Rossman and Rallis (2003) contend that narrative research values the story of lived experiences, and is an important means for representing and explaining personal and social experiences" (p. 98). Marshall and Rossman (2011) recognize narrative analysis as an interdisciplinary approach with many guises that portend to describe life experiences of the marginalized and oppressed. The concept of crystallization seeks to describe the meaning of experiences for those who have important but frequently unheard messages. Marshall and Rossman go on to say that narrative researchers gain an authentic understanding of the participants and how they have been involved in a process of construction and reconstructing their personal lives.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that the approach taken by “researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (p. 24). The interview process allowed me understand at a deeper level the implications of poverty, and the coping mechanism of these five African American women and to discover and identify common threads and strengths that have carried the women to a better place in life following their episode(s) of homelessness. Combining the two approaches, narrative and phenomenology, addresses the intent to bring light to the issues and the realities of combating the lived experience of homelessness.

Qualitative narratives of five previously homeless African American women can validate the negative power of systems that vilify and curtail transformative growth and community health for solutions to poverty, which ultimately could alleviate homelessness.

In this dissertation, I explored three phases relating to age in the lives of the interviewed participants: The foundational phase (early childhood); the interactive phase (middle life); and outside influences (the present). These three stages can mitigate or elevate the possibilities of success or corruption. The components will be identified through the narratives of the participants that are shared in the interview process.

Participants

The five women who participated this study are African American women. At the time of the interview, all were living in Ramsey County. One interviewee has

subsequently moved to another state with her family. I met four of the five women when they were homeless and staying in a downtown shelter with their families.

The criteria for choosing the age and stability of the women were deliberate. In order to schedule interviews or to have follow up discussions, it was important that I was able to stay in communication with the participants. Initially, I contacted ten women who agreed to be interviewed, but when the time came to schedule the appointment, five of the women either could not be located or were no longer interested in being interviewed. I chose women who had maintained stabilized housing for at least one year. I chose an older age range (35-45) in hopes this has allowed the participants the opportunity to reflect on their choices and to gain a more in-depth perspective of their life. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms have been used for the five participants. A chart with demographic and other details can be seen in the Appendix.

Ann

Ann is a homemaker with dreams of designing a specialized scooter for people with physical limitations. She received the patent rights for a scooter design in the spring of 2013. Ann was born with cerebral palsy (CP). She is married. They have three children: one graduated from high school in 2012, the second a high school junior who also has CP, and a 13 year old son. In late spring of 2013, the family moved to another state. Ann experienced only one episode of homelessness when the family moved to St. Paul six years ago.

Rita

Rita, mother of seven, is involved in community politics as an elected official. She has worked as a community organizer and a preschool teacher. She talked about being homeless only once, when she moved her family to Minnesota seven years ago. She was seeking a better place for her children and a fresh start. Rita spent the first six months in Minnesota living in a shelter. Since that time, she and her family have maintained stable housing.

Patty

Patty has two sons. Her husband, the father of the second child, recently died. She is on disability but is a skilled welder. She and her youngest son have stayed in stable housing for four years. Her son will graduate in June 2014. Rita's plan is to move to a suburban neighborhood.

Toya

Toya has three children living with her and one daughter living with her father out of state. Toya completed her studies for an Associates degree the summer 2013 with plans to enroll at Metro State to complete her studies for a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education. She has lived in stable transitional housing for two years.

Joanna

Joanna has two adult children. She currently works in social services. In the fall, she began studying for an Associates degree in early childhood education. This spring

Joanna's three year old grandson died from heart disease. She has lived in stable housing for four years.

Interview Method

The interviewing process began with an initial conversation with ten women. At that time, I described my goal to complete my doctoral studies by writing a dissertation that highlights the stories and childhood memories of African American who have been homeless. Because I knew the women from the time there were in shelter and because they now had a few years of stability, I felt they were ready for the challenge of sharing their personal stories with me. They understood how much I valued their courage and tenacity in the face of the daunting issues of poverty and homelessness. They also understood the importance of their involvement in the writing of this dissertation. Five women consented to be interviewed. Interview sessions were arranged to meet their schedules.

I completed all steps set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of St. Thomas. All five women signed the consent forms necessary to participate in this research project. With each participant, I conducted three separate 60 to 90 minute interviews that were taped and later transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The women understood that this project was voluntary and included an in-depth interviewing process. The participants agreed to talk about the following issues:

- Session one: participants were asked about childhood foundational underpinnings and messages or guidance received from people within their inner circle.

- Session two: the women were asked about life skills that were gained in early adult life.
- Session three: (1) focused on outside influences, (2) how participants influence the outside world, and (3) how they are influenced by the outside world.

All the interviews began with an explanation of the tree metaphor that was designed for this dissertation. I asked each participant to think of her life as a growing tree. Throughout the interview process, the metaphor of the life stages of a tree became a very important visual. The tree was a reminder of how their lives have a co-existence relationship that is easy to compare to the growth and development of a tree. Conception was compared to the initial planting of the seed by parents. Childhood represented the all-important root system; a healthy sapling grows from a strong taproot and a plethora of smaller roots supply moisture and nutrients that are necessary to maintaining a strong root system. The second interview used the metaphorical visual of the tree trunk. This concept symbolizes the middle years; the development of the bark to protect the inner core. At the same time, the tree is developing limbs that encourage growth and the assurance of good balance. The third interview prompted conversation about current concerns and how or if they have influential stakes in the community, or how the community issues influence their lives. The community interaction is metaphorically compared to the leafing and sprawl.

First Interview

The participants were asked about childhood foundational underpinnings and messages or guidance received from people within their inner circle as they were asked to metaphorically visualize themselves as a tree. The first interview relates to the unseen roots that are vital for the life of a tree. It involves listening to the interviewees and glean information about their childhood memories. The roots of life identify strengths and challenges as they incorporate foundational influences received by the participants. These are the memories and stories that become the source of strength or negative barriers the participant must overcome for success and stability in their adult life. The foundational concepts developed with childhood are detailed in Figure 2 below.

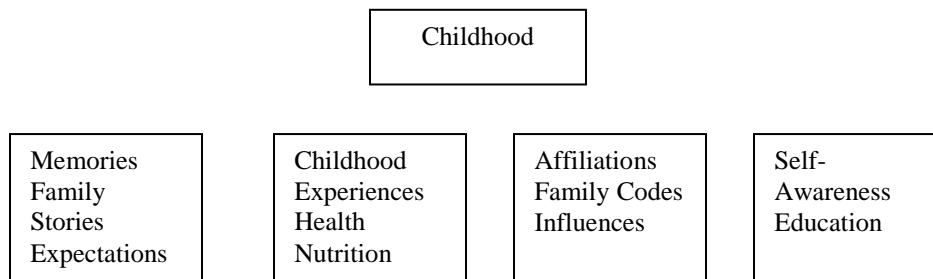


Figure 2. Roots of Life

Second Interview

The trunk, which sustains the limbs and branches, also allows for the flow of information; the release, the giving out, and the reception of information and emotions. During the second interview, the women were asked to incorporate learned responses and integrate those responses into comprehensive learning arenas as they grew and matured into adulthood. The ebb and flow of information builds the emotional and social web for development. Holistically, the interactive spheres become influential in shaping

responses that deepen the understanding of life experiences and have the potential to become valuable sources of information to unearth some of the dilemmas of poverty.

Learned responses are delivered via personal interaction with the family, community, social networks and spiritual support through organizations of faith. Government entitlement services and programs and positions of financial security or insecurity become positive and sometimes negative partners in meeting the challenges of progress. Violence is can be a large determiner in how the subjects build trust to live with the confidence that they will be safe.

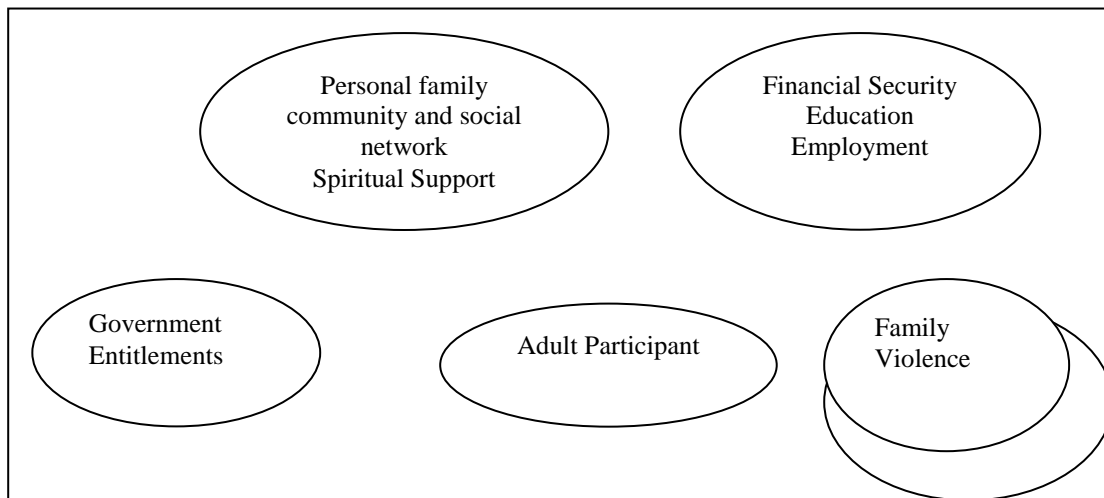


Figure 3. Interactive Influential Spheres

Third Interview

For the last interview, the women were asked about outside environmental demands and barometric pressures that have powerful influences on the continued growth and development for their well-being. When the environment around the tree is toxic, it can stymie the ability to encourage and foster growth. The third interview focused on responses to issues that are generated from outside influential sources that continue to

shape/mold the participant's progress, and the incorporation of the responses into their lives. The influences along the continuum of life that affect personal decisions are shown in Figure 4 below.

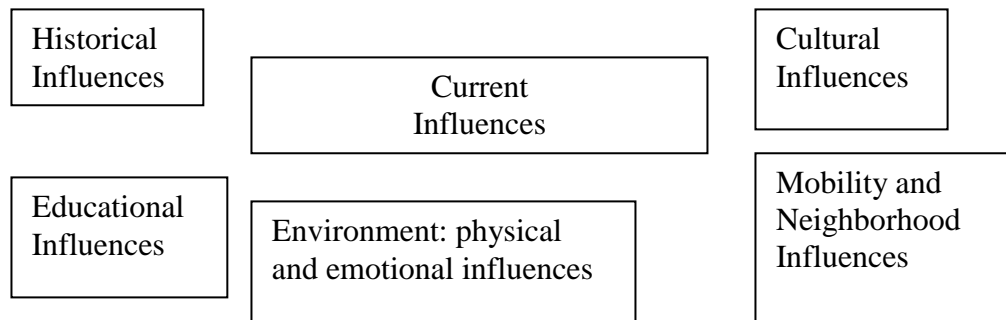


Figure 4. Influences that Affect Decisions

The discussion points of the third interview were designed to build a better understanding of the lived experiences in hopes of broadening the community dialog regarding solutions to combating poverty.

Timetable and Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed by an outside source. At the first interview, the participants signed a form allowing me permission to conduct interviews and use their data in my dissertation.

The interview process began in fall of 2012 and was completed before spring of 2013. The interviews were done over a six-week period, so those being interviewed did not lose interest or become too busy to complete all the interviews. From the transcribed interviews, I identified and analyzed the data. From that, I compiled a list of themes that have similar common threads and identify tools for success. The identified themes are:

- Family interactions
- The importance of education
- Abuse/violence
- Nutrition
- Stability in childhood
- Health issues
- Sibling interactions
- Faith traditions
- Education
- Community involvement
- Social services

Coding Process

I began analyzing data by keeping all interview transcripts in a three ring binder, and I numbered all the lines of the participants' interviews. This allowed me easier access to direct quotes. I color coded the emerging themes with highlighters and used color related tabs for related themes. The notebook for the participant interviews was divided under individualized participant headers. The interviews were in sequential order. Using the colors on the transcribed interviews made it easy to retrieve information to be included in the dissertation.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Narratives of homeless African American women authenticate the power of personal accomplishments and changes that benefit the person, the family, and ultimately the community. Data to be analyzed comes from the personal stories of the five women interviewed. The telling of stories has been a tradition of humankind, which came into existence with the development of speech. Today, the telling of stories is captured by phenomenologists who report the real lived experiences by living with those for whom the story is about. Regarding the methodology I for data analysis I have included longer, uninterrupted interview dialogs that resemble soliloquies.

The identities of the participants for the study are:

- Ann, a homemaker
- Rita, a community organizer
- Patty, on disability
- Toya, a student and mother
- Joanna, who works in social services

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are:

- What are the emerging themes from African American women who have experienced poverty and homelessness as they disclose childhood memories?

- Do the qualitative stories of homeless African American women validate the negative power of systems that vilify and curtail transformative growth and community health for solutions to poverty that alleviate homelessness?

Emerging Themes

The research process was to identify the emerging themes captured from the interviews of the five African American women who have experienced poverty and homelessness as they disclose childhood memories and lifetime experiences. The women were initially guided by the questions created for the interviews. The circumstances of the conversation make a big difference in how each person responded. Even though there were multiple themes that emerged, each theme was underscored with sub-texts. For example, there is the possibility that the health theme could be related to violence. The five themes emerging from the data are:

- The importance of childhood memories in regard to interaction and experiences with parents, siblings, relatives, and the community
- Educational experiences
- Childhood health issues or serious injuries
- Experiences with family or community violence
- Violence

Other themes that emerged became sub-themes. They were:

- Family dynamics
- Abandonment

- Nutrition
- Stability
- Problem solving faith traditions
- Community awareness

The initial interview questions centered on the early years and ultimately how memory (and stories) connect with the participants and their ability to successfully maneuver their way through personal life issues. Was success in life possible because the women had received the necessary life skills tools in those development years to proceed through life's complicated factors? How will these experiences help community to understand homelessness? These were possible underlining questions that may be answered by the participants during the interviews.

First Interviews

First Memories

During the first interview with Ann, she talked about her first memory by referring to the situation of her birth. The idea that she was not wanted or that the health issues she was born with posed many issues were prominent throughout her life.

...my mother was 18 years old when I was born. My dad was 22, my dad finished high school. I believe he started college – he didn't finish, of course. My mother was 17 when they got together, she was pregnant with my sister at 17, had me the next year [when she was] 18. I was born three months early, my mother had a problem with me being born so early and then ending up with three holes in my heart and being diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

I was told that my mother was not capable of dealing with the profound problems that she must have thought that I was going to have. So a lot of how I was taken care of the early part of my life, I believe my dad, if I remember right, he took on a lot of the responsibility of making sure that I was at the doctors, went to my check-ups and so forth.

Ultimately, her father was and is still a major emotional care provider in her life. There will be other circumstances that will play out and bring to the forefront the importance of the “older” man theme in Ann’s life; for example, her husband is fourteen years her senior. Also Ann will relate the negative feelings and emotional confusion of not being nurtured by her mother. Below she tells of the complications of having a stepmother who was not affectionate or supportive:

I loved my stepmother in spite of the way she treated me because I really understood her, I got her and she knew I did and she didn’t like that either – that I could see her and that she wasn’t hid from me. All of the little things that she was about that she hid from other people I could see and she knew that. And sometimes when you can see a person they don’t like you because you can see them. I began to tell her, “Well, it’s nothing you can do. I just love you. And everything that you do, love covers. I love you.”

So she gave up, she stopped fighting me, she stopped fighting the affection that I had for her. When I would tell her I love you, [she would say] “Don’t say that.” “Stop saying that.” I didn’t stop and so she began to say, “I love you too.” I’d say, “Really?” And she’d say, “Yeah, really, don’t you know I love you?” I said, “No. I love you but no, I never knew that you loved me.” She said, “Haven’t

I always told you the truth?” I thought about it, and I said, “Yes, you’ve always told me the truth, you never lied to me.” “So, yes, I love you, I’ve always told you the truth.” And so I began to realize that that is an example of what real love is.

In this step-daughter/step mother relationship, truth telling was the ultimate premise for love. Even now Ann’s relationships with others hinge on her version of truth-telling.

Rita’s early years were related to me via the importance of community:

I can remember as young as probably 5 years old. I lived in an African American community. One of my most vivid memories were the apartment buildings that we lived in. It was a very large apartment building with many, many, many families in the building – it was kind of wrapped around the block.

What I remember is just knowing many, many of those families in the building. I remember we stayed on the second floor and we were really, really close to our neighbors on the third floor – they was the Williams family; we’re still connected to the Williams family to this day. But what I remember about it, in the summertime we had this big, big back yard – not much grass but lots of dirt, but with that dirt came lots and lots of games. I’ve always been actively athletic, so we played a lot of softball – a lot of softball. We played this game called “Roof to Peg” – where you played with a butter knife.

In the first interview with Rita, she expressed the importance of community that is still an important aspect of her life. As a younger child her community defined community as it centered on the apartment complex on the south side of Chicago.

In the first interview with Patty, she articulated the normal family behavior of caring, particularly, during a time of her father's illness:

My father was sick all the time. We would always have to go to the VA Hospital and it was always a long trip. We'd get to go on the bus with the electricity on, the electric bus. And we were always happy when he came home. My father, he died when I was 10. So we used to do that all the time to go visit my dad.

Joanna remembers the importance of food in her early years:

I can think of something that brought me joy, that was happy, and then I can think of a bad experience also. So I'll talk about the good first. A good thing is just meals and cooking. That pops out as far as from in the family. My grandma cooked a lot, my auntie also lived with us. She did a lot of cooking.

So, yeah, I guess it would be more family oriented, that we all sat and ate together or cooked big meals and everyone ate at the same time and everybody came over. Or we sat and watched maybe a movie or me and my brothers and sisters we liked to dance and sing a lot so we pretty much would entertain everybody with our singing and our dancing.

Toya says one of her early memories took place in preschool when she brought a treat for her classmates:

Mom brought me a bag of jelly beans to share with the friends in my class and I remember going out to get my things and this girl that I had gotten close to was in my backpack eating all of the candy. She wanted her share. And I remember getting upset – I was in tears at that time because today is my turn and you're

taking away from the entire class. I mean, she had eaten half of the bag and she was just scarfing the jelly beans down. I remember snatching the bag out of her hand. I didn't hit her, I didn't scream at her or anything. I snatched my bag and I told her, "You're not my friend." The average line that most 3-year-olds use. "You are not my friend." And so I walked into the classroom and I told the teacher what had happened. I was just so upset – I was so upset that day. But [even though] I was upset, I still ended up having a good day. There was no behavior issues, nothing to report to my mom.

The emerging themes centering on first memories indicate how the family and community assume a major role in growing strong roots. Other stories from the first memories also carry painful incidents that also aided in strengthening the root. In some of the life events, it is difficult to understand how negativity can foster a lasting outcome, but it is possible.

In Ann's early memories regarding her physical limitations, she learned that it was her father who ultimately became her primary caregiver. She learned at a young age not to depend on her mother for care. Joanna had a large extended family that looked out for her well-being, but consistently they turned closed eyes to the meaning of her safety. But "well-being" had a different meaning than physical or emotional safety. Patty's father died when she was ten. She then had no choice but to depend solely on her mother for care.

The efforts and reality of how the women were cared for in their childhood will be seen later in their lives. Their childhood stories are precursors as to how they relate and position themselves in their adult lives. There is a strong connection to experiences

and current life issues and how they relate to themselves, their own families how they care for the community.

There is the underlining message that the women expect cooperation from the community regarding their care. Rita said as a child she felt safe in her community. Patty expressed her joy in going to school. Joanna had a group of friends in school who supported her. The interview process for the first memory segment usually centered on elementary school experiences. School holds a sacred place and is a common denominator for memory.

Early memory regarding death and dying are viewed in a variety of ways, especially if death is due to illness, accident, violence, or age. Of course, a lot depends on the circumstances and the age of the child and the family member who dies. Two of the women experienced the death of a father when they were ten or twelve years old. Patty reported the death as a normal happenstance. He had been ill for several years. As a family, it was normal to make a weekly trip to the Veterans Hospital for a visit.

Rita's father died under unusual circumstances. She talked quite a bit about his life and death:

My father was killed when I was 12 – my father was murdered when I think I was 12.

By this time my mother and my father had separated, I think when I was 10 [when they separated]. And to me what happens, because they were going through many fights for many different reasons, my father was a drinker, you probably could say he was an alcoholic, and he would drink and cause a lot of

fights and arguments. So it just came to a point where my mother just decided enough was enough.

But what happened with that, and with us as his children, was that we found ourselves spending more time with him because he would come pick us up every Sunday. Every Sunday we knew our father was coming to pick us up, we were going to get in his station wagon and we were going to go to a park and go to a picnic, we were going to do something together when that happened. But it also was an opportunity for me to get to know him better – not only as a father but as a person. We would go to his house and we would spend the night in his house, we had that one-to-one time with him in a way that I can say we didn't have it before when he was in the household, when he was working everyday.

So when he was murdered, I remember really clear my mom getting a phone call from his sister saying he had been shot in a fight over a parking space with one of his co-workers. And I remember getting that phone call – I remember my mom coming to the bedroom to tell us that our father had been shot and was at the hospital. And I remember lying up in bed just wishing and praying and hoping that he would be OK, that everything would be OK, and her coming back later on saying that he was dead, he didn't make it. And just feeling that grief, just when you are getting to know someone and spending time with someone, they're gone. And so wishing that you had more time, that maybe it's not true – just maybe it's not true and just maybe he's going to be OK. I can remember that... I don't know why I'm getting emotional now.

But I can remember that so clear, of having that conversation with her. I can remember being in bed waiting to hear how things were and going to the funeral and just missing having him there as a father. He had been a part of my life... because if I was 12, my sister 11, and then there was 10, and I think the youngest was like 5 when that happened.

Childhood Educational Experiences

Questions about what school was like and other questions regarding the importance or difficulties of school were discussed by all interviewees. They all agreed that education was a significant factor in their success. They had different values in understanding the process, and different stories of how they depended on the learning experience. They all talked about a special person in their educational journey. Some of the congealed experiences of education were held together with the women's health issues. Today it is said that success in school is related to the child having regular attendance. But how is education obtained when a child has an illness that limits school attendance, or when mental health or family trauma takes a child away from school? School, for some of the stories from the women, became a safe haven, away from traumatic family circumstances.

Ann's biological mother was a supporter of the education process. Ann said:
... because she [her mother] didn't graduate from high school. She put that in all of us – from birth, I believe, that you have [to have an] education [that] had to be paramount. It had to be first place and she put that standard in our family today.

Her stepmother was a teacher:

She was working in schools but she never stopped going to school. She was into being educated all the time. She went to school, she went to Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee...

Since Ann was born with CP and other complications, she had to undergo extensive surgeries that changed the look of the classroom for her.

...because I was in the Shrine Schools, they had schools in the hospital, you could go to school there. So I was in my bed and the bed would roll right into the ward-like atmosphere and you would have school. I hated it. I wanted to go home so bad, I was so lonely, I was hurt, I was sad.

Ann also felt her health conditions led to her being mis-educated.

Just experiencing being at school there was difficult for me. The reason it was difficult was because I always felt that I didn't belong there, I always felt like it was beneath me – not that I thought I was better, I just thought I wasn't getting the education I should have been getting. [I]t was a school for slow learners – because in those days, they thought that if your legs were slow, your mind was [too].

At that time, in that particular educational system, if you got to a certain age you were given a certificate of completion and not a diploma. Ann wanted a high school diploma, so it took her an additional three years to obtain it.

When I got ready to graduate . . . I had to stay longer because I was in a school for slow learners because during those years, back when I was born, they didn't . . .

like I told you earlier, they believed if your legs were slow your mind was [too]. So I ended up staying an extra three years so I was 20 by the time I graduated.

My dad came and my sister Clarisse came from Chicago, so they went to my graduation with me. I had promised my dad, because I wanted to go to college right after I graduated even though I had stayed longer than I would have, he and I made a deal that if I went to business school, which was basically a trade school, he would not say a word if I finished and wanted to go to college. I said “OK” grudgingly. So I ended up finishing vocational school where I got a certificate in clerical record keeping.

One of Rita’s grade school experiences emulates that of the author and educator, bell hooks when she relates the importance of having teachers living in community with her.

...most of the teachers at that time in my community were African American. Most of the teachers were . . . a principal may have been white but the teachers were mostly African American teachers. So I lived in a community where the teachers were African American and the local businesses were African American [owned], you’d go to the doctor and they’d be African American. You would see a nurse, they’d be African American... community organizations, African Americans.

One teacher in particular stood out in Rita’s memory:

She probably stood out because of the relationship she had with me – you know, making that connection that goes beyond not just the classroom but people take a

personal investment in you as a person, as an individual, and they connect that to not only you but to your family. If she was able to come into my community and to my house, she had a relationship with my mother, someone that my mother trusted and saw it as part of normal part of your education. So, yeah – and I’m going to assume she made me feel safe.

Rita’s thoughts regarding her community education, which was delivered by primarily African American teachers, brings to the center the question: Was the desegregation of schools a benefit or a loss for children of color? Then does it follow that the integration of neighborhoods (peripherally instigated by the destruction of communities by the Interstate highway progress) influenced community changes? Other women in this study will also bring up the point that they valued the education they received from African American teachers. bell hooks relates to the positive aspects of learning from teachers who taught in the neighborhood in which they lived. Rita added:

The teachers and the principals and the homeowners who lived in the community, they were all part of that community, but so were those who were on aid and assistance and there were prostitutes and others – we all lived in the same community. So going back really, really early, I’ve always had that sense of community and being connected to your neighbors. Probably why I do the work I do – that sense of community. And also, that because that’s what I saw.

Rita was the only participant who related to the importance of being taught by African American teachers. But others talked about the value of living in a homogenous community. Patty said:

Our neighbors, we were all close, the whole neighborhood. There was only one neighbor on the block who thought she owned the alley and the sidewalk and the grass, that she didn't want us to walk on. But I played with her daughter, even though she was older than me, we would always play hopscotch and tiddlywinks and stuff like that. But all of our neighbors we used to play together, we'd play in the street, we'd play baseball or whatever – softball, until they'd run us up to the park and tell us to get off the street.

A lot of times when it would get too hot, we'd crawl in [under] a fire hydrant, we'd do that because it was right in between my house and one of my other neighbor's house and we'd have water all over for awhile.

I still have family there, I go back to the neighborhood and see the house I grew up in. It's changed but it's still there. The next door neighbor, she's still there and another lady who used to live on the other side of us, she's still there and her mother used to live right next door to her, that's the one who thought she owned the streets and stuff, she passed away but I don't know who is staying there.

Joanna's first educational experience was olfactory: kindergarten is a memory of smell. Still today she remembers the smell of her school. She says it is neither a good or bad memory, just a memory:

Kindergarten – that's really weird. It's a smell, a smell that my... and I only say that because even now as an adult when I go back to Milwaukee, where I'm from, we drive past that place – the building is still there but I'm sure it's not what it

used to be, I used to think of the smell. That's the first thing that will come to me - for breakfast, something that they would cook, it would have this certain smell to it. I don't remember anything else about there but eating and then the smell of something in that building. It just kept a certain... not that it was an icky smell, but it had a certain smell to it. That's weird, how do I remember it smelling and nothing else?

Joanna's other grade school memories are both positive and less positive:

Oh wow. I just... I guess one of the other points we'll hit that because I had a fear of going back to school, that's why it took me so long to go, because of being told something - that I would never ... no, actually I was told I would be just like my mom and it was Irat [my aunt] who told me it because she was supposed to be my mom and that we'll probably get in a little while later but... school was fun.

Again, I liked friends and I made lots of friends. I was like... I won't say like a top person in there, but I knew everybody, everyone knew me and again, wherever I went, we were singing, we were dancing, and just having a good time. Elementary, I don't remember anything bad.

Rita says her school, home, and family interactions were positive. During this part of the interview, she seemed very relaxed as she talked about her mother and friends. It was important to listen to her talk about her mother and how she interacted with her friends. I believe this type of parent/child interaction can build healthy relationships for a child's future.

I was also active in school – again, very athletic with softball, volleyball. Because my mother was a stay-home mom, she was active in community organizations. She was always one of these people that... you know, had many girlfriends and they would get together and they would play cards. A lot of my memories of my mom, who loved to cook, are of cooking and inviting people over to the house and then playing cards and drinking. That was just part of their whole day.

I love bid whist, I'm a bid whist player to this day. I don't care so much about spades but I started playing cards really early – just me watching them play cards. But she loved to barbeque so we would do plenty of barbeques and she would invite people over – her friends and neighbors, relatives. We did that a lot with me coming up.

But she was also connected to a community organization called The Women's Organization, called TWOs. She was on the steering committee and very active with that part. And so I remember as a 12 and 13-year-old – and the organization was in the community, and so I remember as a 12-year-old and 13-year-old that we formed our own little club. As a 13-year-old we had our own little club where most of my closest friends right now are the closest friends from my childhood, we still stay connected – whenever I go back home, I check in. But those same friends, along with my sister who is a year younger than me, who always in my young age I hated, but we always was together – we had many fights, me and my sister, but we were the closest of friends, even to today. But along with me, my sister that's a year younger than me, and we had like a network of friends, and we formed a club and we would walk to the parks together.

Patty talked about the strength and determination of her mother. Her mother believed that Patty should attend college, because that was the only way success would be realized for her daughter.

My mom sacrificed and put me in Catholic High School [private school was better than the public schools in her community] even though she couldn't afford it. We were getting the little checks, social security checks from when my dad passed away, and she used some of that money to help put me through school. She worked. I went to high school for two years and at the end of two years, I had 25 [high school] credits and then I didn't need but 18 to graduate because all through my life, every year in the summer time.

In weaving, there is the warp and the weft; these kinds of conversations between mother and daughter can be likened to the weaving of a fine fabric. The interaction creates fabric for the future.

Rita watched as her mother built a relationship with her friends. Even though she admits to being a quiet person, she is still a very social person. Patty's mother knew she was gifted and sacrificed to give her an education of high quality.

Memories frequently are centered on a distressing event. Rita experienced a fire in her apartment complex when she was young. But it was not the fire, per se, which she recalls as being important. It was the way in which one teacher came to her aid:

I remember... I had to be around... probably 9 or 10, we were in a fire, the building caught on fire. We lived on the second floor... but at this house on Greenwood, not our house, but one of our neighbor's house caught on fire. And I

remember we all got out safely from there but I also remember going to school so after the fire was put out, my mother went back in and we salvaged some of our clothing and things like that, but I remember going to school wearing some of those clothes and somewhere in that place I remember one of my teachers invited my mother to come up to school because I smelled like smoke – my clothes was a part of being in that fire. I remember having a conversation with my mother about that – my mother had a conversation with me about it. But I usually have pretty good memories about my school, about my community.

I asked Rita whether or not the teacher was being kind.

She was helping, she was just bringing an awareness that... you know, this is what... I always believe it's important for us to be honest about people. It wouldn't be nice to allow people to walk around smelling like smoke because they smell like smoke and not say anything. It's not OK to act like it's not there...

I went to the same school from kindergarten through 8th grade.

As a child, Rita stuttered and because of her speech impediment, there were times Rita had a difficult time in school:

I can look back at 7th grade and still having a panic attack thinking that the teacher would call on me to read. That would mean I'd have to begin a sentence, begin a reading process and feeling like, "Oh my God" and don't want no one to call on me and ask me to read because I know I'm going to stutter and not be able to get my first word out and that it was going to be really, really hard. I don't remember getting any therapy – I guess I just grew out of it by the time I went to

high school. I don't remember stuttering in high school. I don't remember it being such a big part of my 8th grade history.

Spiritual Experiences in Early Childhood

Throughout history, religion and/or the belief in a higher power has played a noticeable role in the lives of humanity. Currently, there is the trend of not belonging to an organized religion, but the several of the women interviewed find that personal belief and organized religions are still powerful influences in their lives.

When Ann was a child, she tried to *pray* her father out of marriage to woman whom she perceived as “unworthy.”

I adored my dad. And, of course, him marrying my stepmother, she wasn't perfect enough for my dad. So even though I began to fall in love with her, I saw flaws that I felt like he didn't deserve so I began to pray for him too... I was a little girl, I didn't know I was destroying a marriage by praying for him. So I began to pray that the right woman would come into his life, someone that adored him like I did because I knew I couldn't marry him, he was my dad. But I started to pray.

Ann's penchant of *praying for change* kept her hopes high. She knew her life would be better if only her step mom was not in the picture. In her middle years, after moving out from her mother's house, she joined a religious community (which she called a cult). In one incident, she recalled being asked to leave the community, for which she deemed was due to unreliable leadership. Ann says:

I was imprisoned – we all were, we all were very much so. But then the Holy Ghost, toward my sixth year there, the Holy Ghost began to deal with me and you

know, he always did since I was a child. He told me, “I’m going to bust this wide open. I’m going to break this up.” I didn’t tell anybody. One of my friends called from another church I used to go to, I told her. I said, “The Holy Ghost said he’s going to break this up.”

Patty’s first conversation regarding a spiritual presence in her life came in her childhood memories. The rejection of going to church was not about the religious experience, but about beauty.

...but my mom was a hair dresser and she would do our hair. I used to have long hair and every time we had to go to his church we had to put our scarves on because that’s what Muslims do and we didn’t like that. We kept telling mom, “We don’t want to go to daddy’s church, we have to cover our hair up, we mess our hair up.”

As a child, Patty did not join the Muslim tradition. She is currently active in a local mainstream congregation. Patty attended a Catholic high school, but did not allude to joining the Catholic tradition. Talking about her faith she said:

...when I was younger we grew up going to the First Church of Deliverance, Reverend Clarence H. Cobb, was the reverend. I went to church faithfully, I guess, up until I was about 12 and I guess we kind of stopped going for a while, then started picking up going back to church when I was maybe 16, 17. I would go off and on, then after I had my first child when I was 20, I would go to church off and on. Yes. I really loved my preacher. He just reminded me of a Godly preacher. And then when I went to get baptized and he had put me under, I

remember that I almost drown or something up under the water. He told my mom that I was a special person or something like that, that God was going to be looking after me. And it seems like God has been.

Joanna acknowledges that being brought up in the church was a positive experience, one that she relies on today:

Now that I'm older and I understand a little more and I've been in church, different churches and different things – I mean, I was raised in it, my grandma always took me, not everybody else – just me, which I'm glad because I wouldn't have the knowledge probably now that I do.

Three months after the interview, Joanna's three year old grandson succumbed to heart disease. The incident shook her, but I think she survived because of her faith. It is the same dependence on a higher being that brought her through childhood and brutal sexual attacks. In disclosing family secrets, she shared how her brother repeatedly abused her. She attributes his penchant of sexual misbehavior on generational malfeasance.

...since I've been to church, I've learned things and things have been building – there was a lot of generational things going on. I don't know how spiritual you are, but there are definitely some sexual generational curses or some things of that nature, I believe, were heavy there.

Childhood Illnesses

The National Coalition for the Homeless reports chronic and acute health problems are extremely high among those facing homelessness. The women interviewed all experienced health issues either in childhood or their middle years. Some of the health

issues were due to birth defects, while others appeared later. Earlier, Ann shared that she was born with cerebral palsy, a clubfoot, and a defective heart.

Rita was born with an enlarged tongue. She says:

I was born with... well, I don't know much about this, my mom didn't talk much about it, but I had to be very, very young... I was born with one side of my tongue bigger than the other side and I don't know if that caused the stuttering or not but I was born that way. And so one of my early experiences, and I don't know what age I was but I had to be somewhere before 10 years of age, I remember going into the hospital to have an operation to have them fix my tongue so I could be a little bit more normal.

I remember being wheeled into this large operation room where I was wheeled in on a gurney, on a table, dressed and prepped for an operation, and having all these doctors there to observe me. And I remember that really, really clear. I remember the doctors speaking to me, telling me what to expect – I would be unconscious and going through all of that, and then just waking up later on and everything was all right. And so that may have been a part of my disability or caused me to stutter, I don't know. But I know what the stuttering did do to me and I'm still a very quiet, private person and I think having those early years of being afraid to talk because I knew I was going to stutter allowed me to become more of a good listener than a talker.

Currently, she attributes her quiet demeanor to her speech impediment (stammer). Rita is a political figure. She challenges herself everyday, as she is constantly talking with groups. As a community organizer, she expresses herself well and speaks up regarding

vital issues. Since she stuttered as a child, she was very vigilant as her children began to speak. Of her seven children, two have issues of stammering.

My 22-year-old stutters. He's getting better at it and feeling more comfortable doing it. And my 21-year-old stutters – he's better at hiding it than my 22-year-old, but I have two kids that stutter.

I knew at 2-years-old – my 22-year-old, at 2 he had a hard time forming sounds and words and things like that, so immediately I took him in and began to ask... he has had a speech therapist forever, all through elementary and high school. They say he can hear, he hears well but still today I'm helping him formulate different sounds of words that he puts out. It might be hereditary, you know.

Toya's health issues began in second grade when she contracted chicken pox—not once but twice. Before the vaccine was developed, in most homes, when one child got chicken pox, all the other siblings were infected. That happened in her family. It was exceptional that she broke out twice. This is how Toya explained the beginning of her dermatological health issues:

Here comes second grade. So now we've got these issues – I've got the skin problem that has... it seemed like it quadrupled.

Yes, that's how my skin problem first occurred. I got the chicken pox in kindergarten, after that was over I go into first grade – got it at the end of first grade...

Yeah – I had it twice. Yeah, I got it back-to-back. And so the second time it was worse than it was the first time and so I had to... I remember my mom

telling me that she took me to the emergency room or to the doctor or something and I think she said that she was asking and was it possible for you to get the chicken pox a second time after you've had it the first time and the doctor did say it's rare but in some cases you are able to get it twice.

So the second time, they had given me some penicillin, my mom said, and my skin just went erratically out of control, I broke out everywhere, I could not walk, it even hurt to put on clothes. It was that bad. It was like the skin on my legs, from the knee... between the knee and the ankle, it was like all of that skin was just raw.

All chicken pox. And then with the chicken pox on top of the penicillin, turned it into I had an eczema infection. I had to be hospitalized for 30 days...

When Toya was in shelter, the staff noticed how particular she was about her meals, habitually choosing not to eat. Toya never divulged her special dietary needs, other than she did not eat pork (which is a normal dietary restriction). The staff labeled her a "picky" eater. Working with people in poverty, the "theyisms" surface. It is expected that "they" be grateful for what "they" get; "they" should accept what is being offered; "they" should not rock the boat for special treatment. As I think back, we as staff labeled Toya as special. Not just for her dietary restrictions, but in many other ways, which I will expand upon later in the interview process. Toya always had a special way of being herself.

The chicken pox and incident with penicillin changed her life. Her time spent in the hospital was difficult:

My parents were very supportive. Nowadays you look at parenting now compared to back then. When children are going through things like that, it messes with them emotionally and mentally and then to have a parent drive down on something that they can't help and control, that's not helping the child. My parents were pretty supportive.

My mom was there every day when I was in the hospital. She would come and bring my homework. She made sure that I didn't fall behind in school. Like I said, I think I was in the hospital for like two months. All the kids and teachers and principals and stuff had wrote me out cards, get well cards and stuff. They were sending balloons and everything to me and I remember hating taking those oatmeal baths and getting used to having to do this when I leave out of the hospital. That was a mental... here I am, six years old, I have to do all of this thought processing and I think that being that my brain was working, I'm not going to say over time, but being that it was constantly on the roll, I think it made me grow up a little a faster than I should have.

There were more incidents in which her health issues became major events in her life. I asked if her skin played a major role, and she responded:

For a long time it did. Like, in the summer time I'd have on pants, I'd have on shirts that covered up to my elbows. I didn't like to show off my skin and places where I didn't break out – like my face and my hands, over a while throughout the years it would switch. So instead of having this full body, now I have to wear a turtleneck and I've got to cover like this in class so that people aren't staring at me. I was very self... it made me very self-conscious. I felt like having this skin

dermatitis is what they called it back then – having it was like a curse because it was like I was always the center of attention.

I think that's where the behavior started – my behavior mechanics started and the emotional... my emotional mind started to take place. I used to ask them, "Did you lose something over here?" "Did you lose anything? Why are you staring? You see me everyday, you don't have to look so hard." And then I would have other kids who, they wanted to know what was going on.... Not the mean malicious, [not] making fun.

I asked how her siblings reacted to her skin condition:

My brothers and sisters, you know – at that time, they were young so they couldn't grasp the comprehension of anything at that time. I was the only one in school, my brother – I think he was just entering school. So we were three years, so by the time I was in the 4th grade, he was in kindergarten or the 1st. I don't know... my brother, he would beat the kids up for making fun of me. He would fight the kids, he would beat the kids up on the bus or... sock them, if they said anything about my skin because he didn't like that, he didn't think that.

During the next part of the interview, I asked how she was dealing with dermatitis:

It doesn't break out as bad. Over the years I've been experimenting on myself on what foods do I leave at the store or what soaps do I leave at the store. So I've been . . . I've gotten my diet regulated.

I asked what foods she avoids:

Pork, for one – not because of the myths and the history that, you know, our grandmother would always talk about, but they say that I shouldn't have... I need to watch my meats. I can't have things that are too fatty – you know, like red meat, you know, I always cut the... I trim all of it off, I trim it all off. I don't fry my foods as much – I bake them, simmer, all of that stuff. They say things like milk – you know, stuff that I grew up on.

The fat in the milk, the acidity of the orange juice and the tomato juice and stuff like that. At one point they were telling me I couldn't have none of it and they were trying to put me on this foreign stuff that - who wants to drink goat's milk? I saw it, it wasn't appetizing looking, it didn't even look like you could drink it.

If you all don't give me some real food, I'm gonna starve because I cannot – what is the stuff that you guys are trying to feed me and so my mom is like, “Now calm down, calm down, nobody is trying to poison you or anything like that, we're just trying to get you used to eating different stuff than what we normally ate at home. When I grew up, we didn't grow up with pork – my mother, no pork chops, no chitterlings, no none of that.

We did not do it at all. Chicken, beef, turkey, fish – we even had lamb chops back then. You know what I'm saying? Those are the things that, you know, I grew up on.

Ann's major health issue is her lack of mobility because of cerebral palsy. She adamantly refuses to allow her condition to define her, which is admirable. But

throughout her life, it has been her lack of mobility and CP that has been her challenge to overcome.

My legs and feet. My right foot is a clubfoot and I have a slight limp because of the cerebral palsy. But I wasn't raised to feel that I was physically challenged, I just wasn't raised that way. I don't think of myself that way, I don't raise my daughter that way who also has cerebral palsy. I told someone once the other day, sometimes they have a tendency when they find out that I have CP or whatever, they'd say, "Oh..." I say, "It's not Oh, it's just who I am." Does a person who was born blind miss being a seeing person – they've never seen anything, they're just blind. So it's "Oh" with me, it's just me. They said, "Well, I never thought of it like that."

All five women at some point talked about health issues. Some were mild or a brief illness, while some were such as Toya, with ongoing outbreaks of dermatitis. Health problems are still evident today and in their history. They are all very attentive to the health needs of their children and grandchildren.

Violence

Over and over again those experiencing violence nullify the emotional aspects and its large sphere of nastiness. "Nastiness" is a term used by Joanna explaining her victimization as a child at the hands of her brother. Females can become immune to emotional violence. Historically, we thought of the home as a safe place for a child. Kendall-Tackett in the article on "Victimization of Female Children" says the safety of

the home is a fallacy as the four walls of a home are the perfect hiding place for neglect and abuse.

Toya and Joanna disclosed that family members sexually and physically abused them. Rita and Patty were physically mistreated by their spouses. Patty was nearly raped by a family friend. She experienced the retaliation meted out by her brothers toward the perpetrator before a truce was called.

Violence is bundled up in different wraps but the end result is the memory of fear and strength, displayed by all of the participants. The women learned that self-protection was the ultimate goal of sustaining life.

Joanna spoke of violence in her childhood:

As a kid if I answered that I would probably answer different than I'm going to answer now, but there were a lot of things I wondered – like how did I make it through? How did I get through? There was a reason for me to be as strong as I was as a kid.

Because I would fight my whole life. I would have to have that to be able to stand and if I didn't, if I didn't start then I know I wouldn't be where I am now. Sometimes I would be like, "Man, I don't want to be that mean, I don't want to have that grudge." I was even to the point where... very cool, very calm, very collected, just don't rub me the wrong way. Don't – because that defense kicked in quickly, even when it didn't have to. But I was just so used to defending myself and I knew nobody else was going to do it so I'm going to have to fight for myself, I'm going to have to talk for myself. I didn't feel like I had somebody to

have my back. I mean, I kind of had the family there, I had everybody there, and I was the baby – so they all should of [have supported me].

Even my other brother, who I was more close to in age – OK, my elder brother, he stayed in prison a lot so we can even just move him out of the story because that's pretty much...

As I look at this whole family and how it unfolded, our childhood affected a lot of us in different ways – and even now, me and my sisters we have a relationship where we talk about a lot and we were able to release – and I learned a lot from them, they learned a heck of a lot from me because they were molested too in the foster homes they went in.

Joanna identified several types of abuse that were occurring in her family as she describes the interaction between herself and her siblings. Differences in shades of skin color are a reason for negativity or a rift between siblings. Also, the fact that there are family members who are aware of the abuse but choose to remain silent as a mechanism of defense, may heighten the discourse. She explained:

They went in Caucasian foster homes and they all did it, each one they went in they did that to them. But they didn't know the stories that had happened to me within our own family under this roof... and they hated me too because they despised why they went to a foster home and I got to stay. And then I'm darker, my sisters are light skinned, bright skinned that you would think maybe their father was mixed with white or something but it's said that they're not, but they thought it was because of the color of their skin versus mine. So I'm the darkest one of all. So that's kind of what they thought, they thought it was a color thing

and they hated me. They hated me so bad. The times when they did come over, they would blame me for everything – I'd end up getting four or five whoopings while they were just even at our house. Just because everybody blamed me for everything – I really thought that I was a... everything was on me.

My brother would lie and do his little business [sexually abuse her] with me... and my other brother, I don't know if he intentionally tried to make me tough by picking at me and making me fight. I kind of now... I think he knew that our older brother was doing some things [to me] and I think he was kind of trying to train me.

Joanna's violence caused her to seek self-protection in numerous ways:

I think he [her younger brother] was trying to make me tough. I think he was trying to make me tougher on purpose. But I even got to a point where I overstepped him, I did some things to him where he looked like, "Wow, OK – I think you're where I think you need to be so I'm going to leave you alone." I would pick up something and stab him with it – I didn't care. It got that... because I was just tired. I'm like, "Don't touch me, don't bother me, leave me alone." And I knew that the more outrageous things I did, the better result I would get as far as them just stepping off of me and leaving me alone.

So that's... literally, right now if you looked or asked any friends that grew up with me, because I still associate with some of them, they'll say, "You were that little Black girl that walked down the street, you were sweet, you smiled, you played, you stayed to yourself besides the friends that I had that I let in, but nobody better have messed with you. You handled everything well by

yourself.” And I did. I look back, I fought a lot. I fought a lot – I mean, I played and I had fun a lot, but I fought a lot... and because of that, it was just there. I didn’t like for anybody to offend me, do anything wrong to me. And not that I would right come off and fight, I would try to... I would even, in some things, even with kids and boys, I would try to ignore them because I didn’t care what they said. But when you got in my space, that defense went straight up, and I went from this to something like you opened a can of a wildcat.

Toya had other ways to protect herself when children inquired about her skin issues. She became defensively sarcastic. The effects of her condition made her self-conscious, still today she wears clothing that covers the effected areas of her body.

During the interview Patty relates the story of a near rape, for which her brothers got involved. The act of violence could be imposed not toward a person, but because of what happened to a person, in Patty’s case how her brothers intervened for her.

Well, I think I was a teenager, maybe 12, and he was somebody that I liked and he had a motorcycle and I wanted to go for a motorcycle ride. He lived like right up the street from me, or his family stayed up the street from me, and so one day he offered me a motorcycle ride. So I run out of the house and had no shoes on and hopped on the motorcycle. I didn’t know he had intentions of trying to have sex with me and, you know, I wasn’t even thinking about sex.

He rode me up... it was maybe a mile or so away from house and took me up to this road where the railroad tracks – it was desolate. And thank God it was someplace that was like a junkyard or something and some people were there – there was a home there. He told me if I didn’t give him none [sex] that he was

going to leave me there. I told him fine – he left me there, I got to screaming, “Help, help, help.” So the dogs were barking and barking and I told them, “This man, he wanted to rape me and he left me here.” So they let me call my mom and they explained how to get there, my mom came and got me and picked me up, made a police report and my brothers... oh Lord, they were absolutely so... they found the guy, my older took and pistol whipped him. They got the guy, dragged him in front of me, “Is this the guy?” The guy was doing this to me to try to tell me... but I went, “Yes.” So they took and pistol whipped him.

Patty continued to tell the story of retaliation and how gangs (then, thirty years ago) were not as violent as today, but there was community justice taking place.

But that wasn't the end of it. He [the perpetrator] went and come back and started shooting up in the neighborhood, he just missed my grandma. My grandma was standing outside and all of a sudden they just come – pow, pow, pow, pow, pow. So they all ducked and ran in the house. My brothers and them they used to have a whole lot of guys that hung out. They all went and got their guns. We had a huge house. We had a basement area, the regular house area which you had to come up 11 steps, and then we had an upstairs and an upstairs.

They had them stationed at all the windows in the front and downstairs, just waiting for something. Man – and they kept the lights on. My grandmother was scared; my mom was scared – they said, “We're going to handle this.” Finally... I think it went on for about a week or so until one day my brother went around there and they got together and said... told them that somebody was going to wind up dead, you know, we need to squash this and they got it together and

that man never spoke to me again and that was fine. So that was the worst drama we had when I was growing up.

Toya explained how the system separated her family because of suspected abuse by her mother. She says that she can identify and relate to multiple ways in which she was abused while in the foster care system. Her first episode with foster care came when she was fifteen and the mother of an infant daughter. School social workers saw the results of what they identified as abuse and removed her, the baby, and her siblings from their home. When they were under the care of the county, they were able to stay together; however, when the state came into the picture, the children were placed in separate homes. The state stepped in because physical abuse was suspected. This is just one story of Toya's interaction with the social service system.

Too often entitlement programs are not held responsible for the mistreatment that is sustained by those in foster care. We hear the stories of social workers being overworked with an unmanageable number of cases. Systems view the person seeking assistance as a number, empathy is non-existent, and their stories ignored or worse, viewed as purposefully rendered schematic tales. By the time Toya was placed in foster care, her mother and father had divorced. The six siblings were left on their own for much of the day. Toya said:

We didn't get the traditional spankings. It was, if you run, you get hit wherever you get hit. And so my sister ended up with a welt around her eye and she didn't tell my mom about it and she walked out of the door and went to school.

Yeah. We got a whooping because what 5-6 year old is supposed to be on the stove cooking? My mom had these rules and they were kind of like ironclad.

She knew everything. She knew if we cooked, even if we had cleaned up and everything, she would know. There was nothing that we could do that went past her.

I used to think that she would have a camera in the house. She said, no, mother's intuition. She said, "I know and see everything and I don't even have to be here." So we got in trouble for feeding ourselves and my sister ended up with the welt on her eye and she stepped off the bus into the school, straight to the nurse's office. "We got a kid in here with a black eye and we want to know what happened."

I thought it was going to help just to be away from my mom but I don't think... I don't think it hindered me at first, I was still in the denial stage that I was leaving my mom's house. And so, when we did start off in foster home I was still in the vicinity where I could go and visit with my siblings, and then I had to leave because my last foster home was my mother's sister and my aunt was... she was a money-hungry female and they weren't paying her fast enough and so she left and me and my baby were outside in the winter time on the porch with nowhere to go.

[I had] just came from a visit with my mom and so the lady that dropped us off, she pulled off and left and she said something told her to turn back around. And so, I went... it's a process, of course, to the DCFS Office and they assigned someone and then that's when I started traveling. I left Kankakee, they took me out to Aurora.

The precursor to Toya's pattern of abuse was entangled with family secrets. She said their family had a big house, so on Friday nights her cousins would come over for movie night. They would lie out blankets on the floor and eat popcorn and watch a movie. One night, she was awakened by one of the cousins crying because she was being abused by the same uncle who had abused Toya:

There was a lot of that going on. A lot of things that weren't spoken and it was a lot of not so good things going on. We had this thing where all of the cousins would get together – so there was me and my siblings, there was my... my mom has four sisters but only two of them had kids at that time, so we would all get together. We had movie night and stuff like that, we would kick it every weekend, this was an every weekend thing. My parents didn't mind because they had the bigger house than everyone – they had more room for all.

I think there was like 15 of us or so and so I remember one night in particular, we had made this huge pallet on the living room floor – let's say our living room was like if you go from the door of the entry to the community room back to this wall, we had a pretty nice-sized living room. So we had made this huge pallet and everyone had pillows and we had blankets and what not, and I remember waking up because I heard someone crying. Now I've never, ever ran off with an alarm clock, I've always had that internal clock... internal clock they call it. And also, I'm not a heavy sleeper – like this (*she knocks*) will wake me up. And so I remember hearing someone whimpering like they were in pain or something and so I remember turning my head and opening my eyes and my uncle was straddled over one of my cousins with his weeder-wacker down her

throat and she was crying and stuff and so I eased my head back down and closed my eyes and in that 1 or 2 seconds he was on me about to do the same thing that he had just done to my cousin and I got saved because my father – we didn't even hear him come down the stairs. A light flicked on and I said, "Thank you, Jesus."

This is unreported family violence. This is the type of violence that makes the home an unsafe place. Toya continued:

My father was so pissed that he didn't say anything – he walked by, he went and did what he came down there to do and he went upstairs. I did not get bothered, thank you Jesus – I did not get bothered that night, no one else did either, thank goodness. And so the next day, when it came up, my father was still pretty pissed. I thought he was upset with me and, you know, I taught myself how to read body language and so I knew that the way he was looking and how tense his body was, that his anger was not towards me because I hadn't done anything. And so when the subject came up, my dad told my mom what he saw and because this was her brother, you know – this is her baby brother, she didn't want to believe that. And then he turned it into something totally different.

So those things like that we didn't talk about. After that subject came up right then and there and my mother had just dismissed it like... you know what I'm saying, like my father was lying? The relationship between she and I, it changed. The relationship between her and my father had also changed. And so, I felt like I was the black sheep – you know, how dare you take sides with him? And I actually saw what happened before daddy came down. Our relation was very estranged – like I totally remember distancing myself from my mother. I felt

like I couldn't talk to her about anything because anything I would say, "Oh, you're lying."

And so yeah, so I remember totally distancing myself from my mom. I felt like dad already installed the fear of God in us, so you never want to go to dad with... especially with stuff like that. Especially when you as a child observe the behavior and attitudes of your parents and I'm the type... I'm very observational. I can tell what a certain look means, I can tell what a body stance – all of that. And my dad was crushed, I think he was crushed more than anything that my mother took what my uncle had said and then she had just brushed it aside. After he said that, the conversation was over and it didn't get talked about – it didn't get brought back up again until my teenage years. I think my dad had kind of lost respect for my mom or whatever, because like I said, you know, you could tell.

Second and Third Interviews

Memories of Middle Years and Beyond

Late teens and early twenties are a stressful time for most people; the women interviewed were dealing with the strain of self-identification. In Rita's and Patty's life the trauma included the death of a family member. Rita said:

I think from the time I was 13, I knew what I wanted to do and be. I can remember really clear standing at the age of 13 in front of my building, just looking at kids in the community and looking around the community and saying, "I want to be a teacher, I want to teach." So graduate out of high school, went on to college – I went to Southern Illinois University, which was the college that my

older sister went to. I had visited the school with her when I was like ... probably 17. She took me and some more of my friends down to school with her. Southern Illinois University is known for Kappas – they used to have a Kappa Carnival every year, which was huge. I remember going to that and walking around the campus, just enjoying the campus. So I ended up going to the school that my older sister went to.

And so, I went on to college and at 19 my mother became ill. I remember being home for Christmas and having my mom talk about just being in so much pain – she was having pains in her stomach and saying, “After the New Year, I’m going to the doctor, I’m going to find out what’s wrong with me.” I remember going into a hospital in January, February... January they told her that she had tumors so they were going to go in and operate and see what these tumors were. And I remember that happening and finding out that the tumors was cancerous and that was in February – because I remember talking to her on the telephone saying I wanted to come home and her insisting that I didn’t come home because she was just fine. So that was in February of 1980. I was... was I a sophomore? Maybe I was a sophomore in college then. And so, what I do remember from February to June, her being in extreme pain and her really insisting that I didn’t come home because she was fine. And I remember being like - wow, here I am at school, finding out that my mom has cancer, and... I came home.

I came home for Valentine’s Day or something and remember her lying up in bed and she had lost all her hair. I remember going into her bedroom and she had like this one string of hair on the top of her head because all her other hair had

fallen out and getting the scissors and saying, “No need to having this on the top of your head, let’s cut that piece off too.” But I remember from February and her talking and saying that, “Don’t worry about it, go back to school, I’m going to have another operation in June and this other operation is going to really take away some of the pain.” So she also had a sac on her stomach that she was carrying around with her.

I remember my little brother was graduating out of 8th grade, as sick as she was she got up and she went to his graduation in extreme pain, but she refused to not go. My mom was a big woman and she had lost so much weight. My mom had been 250 lbs. plus maybe and by that time she was... I don’t know, maybe 160. She had lost so much weight and she got up and went to his graduation. And so, what I remember about that time is that she went back in end of June for another operation and she never came home – she died in the hospital. I think it was July 2nd she passed away in the hospital, never made it back home.

Patty’s sister was killed in an auto accident. Her depression was so severe that she could not attend school. She dropped out for a short time.

I went to Unity. It was a Catholic High School – I only went there for two years and then I graduated. I stopped going... when I was in high school, my sister got killed. I was going back to be a junior but I had a lot of credits. I had, I think, 25 credits at the end of my sophomore year and other schools all you needed was 18. I told my mama I couldn’t do it because I was depressed and I told her I needed to get out of that school and if not, I wasn’t going to make it because that was still hurtful of my sister’s death. She got hit by a truck – a truck hit her at a stop sign.

A right on a red and he happened to be drunk at the time. She was 13, I think. I was a couple years older than her.

I didn't ever stop going [to school]. I stopped around 16, that's when it was. I was a sophomore but I was going into my junior year and I think I went for about a week and told my mama I couldn't make it. I had so many credits that if I went to another school they were going to take away my religion credits. Well let them take away the religion credits and I still had enough credits to graduate at a regular school. So she didn't put me in a regular school, I went to a private school that one of my friends had told me about and I only went for three months and then the constitution class that I needed to graduate and some others, there was only two credits that I needed, and I did that in three months and I was done with school.

So I kind of took the rest of the year off and around when I turned 17 or whatever, I had decided on to college. I went to the junior college called Olive-Harvey in Chicago. I wasn't sure what I was going to take up even though I love computers, I kept wanting to go into engineering. So I took up electrical engineering classes, I never did get how to do those electrical drawings. I could never see what they saw even though I had all the help in the world. So during that time, when I was 19, I met my son's father through my girlfriend, it was her brother.

Well, you know, I really didn't like him. It took about six months for us to hook up and he was coming over every other day just wanting to sit. And so finally I decided... well anyway, I got pregnant when I was 19 and had my son

when I was 20. I broke away from going to junior college. So after I had my son, he was four months old, I decided to go back to school, which I switched schools – I went to DeVry Institute of Technology and I decided to become an electronic technician. Which the first semester, I messed up because we had a snowstorm and I had separation issues with my son because I was going... somehow, I guess it would get dark early in the winter time and it would snow so much up there in Chicago and I was on the bus and I just couldn't do it. So I messed up the first semester but after that I got it together and I graduated.

Ann did not experience a death. She met a man whom her stepmother did not approve of because he was six years her senior.

I met my first real boyfriend by the time I was 17. Being a physically challenged person and someone really looking at you twice is kind of scary – being a physically challenged person. I met this guy, he was 23, my stepmother... I thought she was going to have a heart attack. She was quick to tell my dad, "This can't be, he's too old for her." And my dad quickly said, "She'll be OK, she's got her head on straight, she'll be all right." I got hooked up with this guy, he was very worldly – so much, he just wasn't anything like what I knew. My stepmother was very... not controlling, but very... she made sure that she knew where we were, who we were dealing with, what was our minds. And so, but this person that I hooked up with was very worldly.

He was 23 – wow. And he knew my mother's side of the family – he called her mom, and he thought of my siblings as his siblings. And I said, "Why can't I be one of your siblings? Why do I have to be anything special?" So he

pursued me and pursued me – he wouldn't let go and I wanted him to. I just wanted him to think of me the way he thought of the rest of my siblings but he said no. And so he pursued me so much so until I gave up and I began to grow feelings for him and my stepmother... my stepfather, the one that just passed, began to tell me, "You don't have to run, don't run. Deal with him... if you want to deal with him, do; if not, don't." And my mother began to say, "Well you might as well take him because you probably won't get anybody else." She was like that toward me. And so, I began to just give him the time of day and begin to allow him to prove to me that he merited having any of my time because that's just the way I thought, that was the way I was raised. I introduced him to my stepmother, she never did like him but she was OK with the way he treated me – and that was until I came home, until I came to Chicago to live for good. I came to Chicago to live for good by the time I was... I guess I was 23 or 24.

His name was Lawrence but we called him Blue. He just adored my mother and my siblings but he never would think of me as a sibling. He wanted a relationship with me – I began to develop real feelings for him. As long as I wasn't there with him and our relationship was long distance, he treated me like a queen. But as soon as I moved into the same town where he lived and I ended up getting my own apartment, which wasn't actually an apartment – it was two large rooms and I made one into a kitchen where I cooked and one into a bedroom and then we shared, with my neighbor, a communal bathroom. So he would come by and we would be together...

The memory Joanna shared with me was about her first pregnancy when she was seventeen. She had three children—two are living and one was killed in an auto accident about five years ago.

My mother wanted me to get an abortion actually and I knew she would probably think like that so I waited until it was too late. I was like six months before I even told anybody. I just wore baggy clothes and played it off to the fullest until one day my brother was like, “Come here.” And I came and he touched my stomach and I was like, “Oh my goodness.” And he was like, “You better tell her, you better tell her.” I’m like, “Ahhh no, no, no, I’m going to wait a little bit.”

So, yeah, I kept it hidden because I kind of figured that that’s the route she would go – she would say, “Get an abortion.” So that was really on her mind. I wasn’t working then, I was going to school. So, OK – yeah, this is what happened. She wanted me to pay for an abortion myself because in her mind I was still going to get this abortion.

So I picked up a job at McDonald’s after school to, what she quote/unquote thought I was going to pay for my own abortion, but in reality I was getting my checks and I was buying baby clothes and I was keeping them down the street at my cousin’s house which [she] lived in a complex that we lived in – so yeah, I was stacking up on baby stuff. She thought I was saving up for this abortion that was \$500-some but in reality I knew I was leaving [home].

I already knew it. So when the time came and she said, “Let’s go do it” that would be the time that I left the house. So, yeah – I ended up getting a closet

full of clothes down there. I didn't know what I was having but it was neutral stuff that I bought.

I didn't [home]. This is kind of how it played out. I ended up staying. I ended up telling her that I was pregnant, she wanted me to do the abortion – I don't know, somebody in the family talked to her because the word got around, got around, got around, got around that that's what her mean self wanted me to do so I believe everybody kind of started calling and bashing her a little bit, like, "How dare you make her do that?" So, I ended up having... I ended up staying there. So basically she ended up accepting it because of everybody else though, that's the only reason. I began to tell everybody, "This is what she wants me to do." But I kind of still ended up leaving because – ok, so yeah, my water burst there walking back from the store. I had the baby. I think we were there like maybe a month after – before the sheriff came and started taking everything out of the house, she hadn't paid the rent. So that's the main reason why I left the house and I ended up going to stay with my brother's girlfriend. And I stayed there for a while until I and a friend that I grew up with, that was the first place I got by myself – me and her went in on an apartment and I got a place. That lasted maybe a year and then she ended up moving back in with her parents because she lost her income so I ended up moving back with my [aunt] who I call mom. And by that time I was pregnant again and... I ended up having Mario, yeah, when I was living with her. Each delivery though – the first delivery, Linda was in there with me but that was the only one. With Mario, I had him by myself – nobody was there.

For me the memories Toya's teen years are the most disturbing because of the influential presence of the social service systems that had forsaken her as a young mother.

At that time, when my daughter and I were separated [she was living with her father] we were already gone from my mom – the state had already come and took us. So, going from one foster to home to another was like hell. I wanted to be back home with my mom because at least I knew I was stable. So by that time, before this happened, I had been in like four foster homes before they transferred me up north in Illinois, so I was away from all of my family. They transferred me up to Aurora.

I had no voice – no. No voice, no decisions about anything. I was mandated to get on birth control and they chose what birth control that I was to take. So, no, I had no voice about anything. When we would go to court I couldn't even get a word in because the state did all the talking.

[The] court ordered me to be on birth control. Then I would have to go to like a home, like a group home type thing, and be separated from my daughter. So I had all of these things that they wanted me to do in order to keep her – I was a baby still, I was still playing with dolls and stuff like that. I still had my little Barbie collection and what-not, you know.

So I did not have that support from my family as far as when it came time to take care of my baby. I had to drop out of school because family members... no one would watch her while I went to school. My mom said that her baby days

were over and she wasn't going to quit her job so I just didn't have anybody, no type of support except for my siblings, and they were all younger than me.

Yeah. So my birthday is in September, the state came and got us in October.

Yeah, she [her mother]... she was both abuse and neglect. She would chain the refrigerator up so that we couldn't cook, we couldn't make meals. She was getting public assistance – she wasn't going grocery shopping or anything.

I asked if at that time she wanted to go back to her mother.

Yeah, because there is a saying, “No one would treat you better than your own parents no matter what you're going through with them.” When I was in those foster homes – you know, the foster moms were just taking the kids in just for the money. Just for the money.

I still didn't have a safe place, I wasn't getting anything I needed. Finally I had to go off – I had to go off, Margaret, on the state. I went down to the DCFS office and I had to snap.

I told them I was going to holler at everybody in court, I was going to be talking this time and everybody was going to be listening to what I had to say – because I told them, I said, “You guys fucking suck.” And that was my perspective on the system, this system that is supposed to be designed to help and protect children and this is the same system that was full of crap.

Yeah. Now some of them [her siblings] had good foster homes, I just happened to luck up on the crappy ones – and so did my sister. As a matter of fact, before I got transferred up to Aurora, I went and lived in the same home as my sister. I knew that we were supposed to get an allowance. So the state pays

these foster moms this sum of money and they're supposed to take a sliver of it, like they weren't even going to miss it, that's how much they were paying them and my sister was telling me that she wasn't getting anything and I was like, "Oh, hell no, I'm not going for that." I'm a teenager, I was high maintenance at the time, I needed everything – I needed hair products, you know what I'm saying. I needed to look fly, you know, I liked to look good at that time. And so I was like, "Oh, no." So I get on the phone, I do not think this is going to work because if you guys are paying her and she's not giving us our money, I'm going to have a problem with that." I said, "My hair needs to be done, you know, I need new clothes, my baby needs stuff – no." And you know, once she gave us the allowance that was it – she was not buying us anything else.

She fed us, yeah. Fed us, we had beds and everything. It was a good home, she just was money only. She just was not doing the right stuff that she needed to do with that money – she was using it for herself and all the other children that were in the home because she had three others and then there was my sister that came, so that made 4 and then there was me [and my baby].

You know you got buku bucks for babies back then. My baby was only a few months old so she got at least, from what I recall back then, she was at least getting about \$4,000 just for my baby.

Educational Experiences in Middle Years

The socio/economic system in America sets a high value on education. Most employment requires completion of high school, but it is becoming more of a trend to

expect secondary diplomas. Certainly, we saw the sacrifice Patty's mother was willing to make to enroll her daughter in schools that she felt were best for her child. Rita's mother also valued education. Even with her mother's health issues, her mother did not want Rita to come home to help with her care. With Ann's physical limitations, she still attended college. Toya and Joanna have returned to school as adults, despite the challenges.

Rita said she had a plan for *not* going to school when she found out her mother was dying:

And I remember thinking, "Gosh, I don't want to be at school – I don't want to be here." And there's no way she's [her mother] going to allow me or let me come back home so I'll just flunk out of school – so if I flunk out of school, you know, I won't have to go back and I can stay home. So I did. I worked really hard to flunk out – I did. I worked really hard – I didn't care about school, it didn't really matter. So you come home from school in May and, you know, you got some time with her in June.

Health Issues

Rita had issues with health care when she was pregnant with her first child. She admits that she neglected prenatal care because she was trying to complete her college education. She said she graduated pregnant and then went looking for medical attention six months into her pregnancy. At 23, how many women know they will have to fight for the right type of medical care? Rita wanting a second opinion was willing to seek out another obstetrician, knowing the consequences.

During my last year I became pregnant and my daughter was due... so another big part of that year was at the age of 23 being pregnant, spending the first six months of my life in school pregnant, coming back home – baby was due in August, trying to find a doctor who would take someone who was pregnant at six months. And what I found is that many doctors don't take a risk like that. If they haven't seen you in those early months, at six and seven months, they don't want to take you.

I ended up finding a private doctor who took me at six months – out in the suburbs, private Asian doctor who took me in, and I lived with my cousin who had had like three or four miscarriages and who had me totally paranoid... totally paranoid about whether or not my baby was kicking, whether or not she was developing right – so I took all of those concerns into my doctor. I'd say, "I don't know if my baby is kicking" or "I don't know if my baby is doing all right." So I ended up going in every week and he would put me on this stress monitor that had the baby's heartbeat – to monitor my heartbeat, to monitor the baby's heartbeat. I would do in every week instead of once a month or whatever. And so, I remember at eight months I went in for my regular check-up and they put all these monitors on you and the heartbeats and I remember the doctor saying to me at eight months, he said to me... he comes back and he's got this long sheet where he's been monitoring the heartbeat and he said, "Your baby is in stress. Your baby is in stress and we need to do a C-section." I'm like, "When?" "Like, we can do it now." And I was like, "Wow." And thinking to myself, "The baby's in stress, I don't believe him because I really feel healthy, I know my baby's kicking and I

really don't believe that my baby is under stress, I'm just doing this because my cousin really has me really, really paranoid."

So I remember just thinking and crying and I'm like, "What am I going to do?" I know that the baby's best chances is being in my womb until nine months, until it's due, and he had already chosen... my due date was August the 24th. So I got on the phone and I called my sister, who is right next to me... who's next older to me, I'm next in line with her. And I'm like, "Diane, I'm at the doctor and the doctor is telling me that I need to have a C-section, that my baby is in stress, but I really don't want to do this and I really don't... I really don't." So she said to me, "Tell him you want a second opinion, just tell him you want a second opinion. This will be OK." I'm like, "Well, he's the doctor." She said, "But you can ask for a second opinion." So he came back in the room and I said to him, "You know, I really respect what you have said to me and I know you want my baby to be healthy and safe along with me, but I want to get a second opinion." And he's sitting like this in front of me and he said, "OK, fine, you can do that. You can go get a second opinion if you like." I said, "OK." And he said, "You get dressed." And then he turned and said to me, "You can get a second opinion but after you get a second opinion, don't come back to me." I was like, "Wait, what do you mean? What am I supposed to do?" He said, "I don't know, but I don't want to see you anymore."

So I remember I put my clothes back on and leaving out of that building in tears because now I have a doctor who says my baby is in stress and also saying, "I don't want to see you anymore." And now I'm eight months pregnant, I'm out

to here, and so I decided to go to Cook County Hospital. You know, Cook County Hospital has some of the best doctors – they’re a county hospital but with some of the best doctors and they do some of the best research. And so I went into the emergency room and I told them I was eight months, the doctor said I was under stress... or that my baby is under stress, it had an irregular heartbeat and that I need a C-Section.

They took me in and ran all these tests and did... for hours, I was just laying there running all types of tests. And finally the doctor comes back and the doctor says to me, “Hmm, you look fine. Everything looks just fine.” I said, “So you’re saying the baby is not under any stress or I don’t need a C-Section.” He’s like, “No, everything looks fine.” I was like, “So why did that doctor tell me that?” He said, “I don’t know, maybe he wanted to go to the Bahamas or buy a new car.” I was so angry and so mad that... because, you know, for a C-Section you get more money if you do a C-Section and that was his only reason. My baby was due August the 24th, she was born August the 24th. I went into labor the morning of August 24th.

Violence in Adult Years

Bronze Woman

bronze woman

sitting there calm and serene
don't you know your belly's been
scooped out?
don't you know that your being is screaming
for what has been taken from you?

bronze woman
still you sit there waiting for what is rightly yours
to be put back
in your serenity, I can hear you
without your head, I can feel your tears
though your hands aren't moving, I can see
your fury

yet still you sit there calm and serene
waiting for what is yours to be put back

–Margaret Lovejoy (1995)

Ann described an incident of abuse she received from her boyfriend, Blue. Kendall-Tackett (2001) contends violence in dating is almost as common as violence for married couples. A saving factor for Ann was the protection from her family regarding the initial abuse.

So when I decided to let Blue go completely, Blue wasn't having it – he just wasn't. "I'm not going to let you go."

And one Christmas, I went to my mother's to spend time with her and I talked to Blue about why don't we just let this go and you go your way and I go mine. He came to my mother's house and said, "Ann, I want to talk to you." I said, "OK." We went down to the basement and he began to attack me and I got away from him and came upstairs and he began to threaten me in front of my mother.

Patty's story is also about relational abuse and her first partner, the father of her oldest son.

When I was with my first son's father, that's where violence was – he used to want to fight me and get on me. I left him a couple of times but it seemed like it was going nowhere and it was over and over and he was hitting me.

I loved that man but I didn't grow up like that so maybe that's why I didn't put up with it. My mom and my dad, if they argued or whatever, they might have did it while we were sleeping but we never heard anything.

It came down to the point where I almost... I had got a gun. We got to fighting and arguing and I had got the gun and the only reason I didn't shoot him was because my young son was sitting on the bed. We lived in a kitchenette out in Indiana and Abdul was on the bed. He hit me and boy, I went to go get my gun out of my purse to shoot him and he started tussling and whipping me. It took two men to get that gun from me because I was determined but the only reason I didn't shoot was because even though we were going back and forth, back and forth, I had like a little Derringer. And the guy [her mate] was whipping me for me not to shoot him because that was the direction he wanted me to go. I was glad the Lord blessed me not to do that and that's when I didn't do it [fight him] no more.

In another relationship, she got married, staying together for thirty years. There were occasional violent interactions between them.

My police officer friend, well he was my boyfriend at the time, he was trying to be violent. Now I have experienced violence with him because when my grandmother died, he took and dislocated my shoulder because I had some friends over to my house, and at that time we were smoking weed...

I never smoked it around him. He knew I was down there and trying to be respectful of him being a police officer, and he took and dislocated my shoulder. I think that was about when my oldest son was maybe about 6. They took me to the hospital and he was trying to tell me not to say anything... I was like, "Yeah, he did it."

He twisted my arm and it just snapped or whatever. So they put me in one of those little body slings or whatever. They wanted me to press charges on him, which I didn't, but he never laid his hand on me again after that.

Violence is often followed by drinking or drug usage. Patty experienced this with her husband when he had been drinking and threatened to shoot her. The article "Violence Against Women by Intimate Relationship Partners" (2001) says this is not uncommon for potential abusers to be more aggressive while drinking. Alcohol has the tendency to act as an anti-inhibitor of drunkenness or being high becomes an excuse to utilize and perpetrate violence. Patty said:

Then when I decided to move to Minnesota, one time he had been drinking and stuff like that, and he was kind of high and he had his gun on the table in the living room, he took the gun and he said, "Bitch, I ought to shoot you now." I'm like, "What?" He said, "Bitch, I ought to shoot you now."

[Later] I talked to my mom, I said, "That man just put a gun to my head and told me 'Bitch he's going to shoot me'." I said, "I need to get the hell up out of here." So it took me a week or so to get my stuff together. He knows me and my mom used to hang out, my mom used to come and get me sometimes after she'd get off of work so it took me a week to go and get my son's transfer and

everything together. Man, I got that transfer, I had one bag packed and didn't look back.

Joanna, in several instances, was the abuser. She disclosed in her early years that she was a fighter. As a child, her brother goaded her into fighting. That training, i.e., self-protection and awareness of advocating for others, did not leave her. It was a skill set she maintained. In one incident, she witnessed her brother abusing his girl friend. Joanna stepped in and defended the woman.

My brother used to fight her, [his girlfriend] a lot and I used to get in the middle of their fights and beat my brother up. I mean, now I'm a girl – this is an older brother. No, I think I was a teenager then. In one particular incident they went to a house party that they used to have back then and he ended up hitting her in her face with an apple because he thought she was looking at someone else. And she came with this fat lip and this fat nose that the apple popped and busted her face. And when I saw her, I'm like, "Why would he do that?" So when he came to the house, I had all his stuff on the porch. I was just throwing it out the window and when he came, oh my God I gave it to him so bad. "How could you put your hands on her? Why did you do this?" I hated to see someone touching somebody else, I couldn't stand it. I flew off the handle, I didn't care. She wasn't even my family but I just didn't like the point that I knew what you did to her was wrong – do it to somebody who can react to you. That's how I always kind of thought, that was weird.

Rita's experience was more along the lines of violence as emotional abandonment. She decided to leave her husband for lack of financial support a family of seven children. She said it was as if her decision to leave him was a result of a spiritual experience.

As a mother of seven, raising four boys in Chicago, and I always highlight my boys because being African American boys and men can be challenging in our society. And so, as I was thinking about... and I didn't really live in a really bad neighborhood but there were gangs, they were pretty young – well, my oldest son was 13 at the time. As I was just looking around, thinking, you know, is this is a place where I would like to raise my kids or not, and just really having these conversations with their father about what we were going to do – do we want to stay in this neighborhood? And we wasn't agreeing at all about what we wanted to do or what was best for them – because I think sometimes in life, you know, life is no more about me as a parent, it's what's best for them. I kind of like heard, you know, through the media, that Minnesota had one of the best educational systems and it was a really family friendly state. I heard it in the back of my mind but it wasn't a decision maker. But, as I was having these really heated conversations with my kid's father about I wanted to do, what we wanted to do, one day in my living room I just decided that I was going to leave – I was going to leave Chicago. I won't get into the whole revelation about me hearing a voice, as I was thinking... I'm looking out my window, I was just standing there looking over the community and I heard this voice that said, "Leave and go to

Minnesota.” And I tell you, I heard it like we’re talking – I heard it and I said,
“Wow, how would I do that?”

Adult Traumatic Memories

The last of the memories, shared by the women from their adult years, are better told by reading the events of Rita and Ann upon their arrival to Minnesota, and the story of Toya, as an emancipated adult at 16. They have very powerful stories:

Rita recounted:

This was in 2000. I arrived in Minnesota on July 2, 2000, I spent the night at his house [her nephew’s] we got there really early, we slept there and the next morning, early in the morning, he took us to the shelter and dropped us off and he left. And all I can remember was sitting in the little waiting area for Mary Jo Copeland to come out – me and my kids.

Sitting there waiting for her to come out and finally she came out and... now remember, this is a faith walk. God said, “Leave it.” I’m like, “Well somebody said it.” So I remember her coming up to me and me telling her my story about why I’m there, I just decided to leave Chicago, and come here and I’m here with my six kids here and we need housing. And I remember her looking at me... I’m going to get to my homeless part but I have to tell this story.

So I remember her looking at me, saying to me, “I’m sorry, we don’t have any room.” Right. And I remember saying, “You don’t have any room.” “Right, you have a big family and we don’t have any large rooms for a big family.” And I promise you, I walked away – turned my back from her and I walked back to sit

down, but as I was walking away, I said in my quiet voice, I said, “God, you told me that you were going to take care of me, you promised me you were going to take care of me.”

And, immediately, about three minutes later, she said, “You, come here.” I was like, “Me?” She said, “Yes.” So me and my kids we all got up and she took us in the back and said, “We don’t have a room but we have this big large room where we could put cots in this room and you guys can lay on cots. Would that be OK?” I was like, “Yeah, that is fine.” Five minutes later, she got a phone call – her phone rang, she picked up her phone and it was her daughter on the phone. Her daughter said, “We have a family here who we’ve been talking to and we’ve had to put them out.” And she turned to me and she said, “We got a room, a family that we’ve been working with, they have not been cooperating, so we have a room for you and your family to stay in and it’s big enough for your family. It’s a two-bedroom with a living room space.”

And I was like... and then she turned around and [I] said, “I have no money.” And she looked at my kids and said, “Well let’s give them some shoes – we’ve got some shoes back here, we can give them some gym shoes and some socks. And here is a voucher for \$200, take it to Target and go shopping.” Just like that, when calling on God, saying, “You promised me you would take care of me” and He just moved things. He moved me, he touched her, she didn’t ask any questions, she just said, “It just happened just like that.” And within a half an hour or 45 minutes, we was in our own little place, that we could call our place – at her place, at Mary’s Place. But it moved just that fast. And so there we were. We had

our own little place that was not our place, that was a shelter, in a place where my nephew was in Coon Rapids, I knew nobody, and I really didn't know where to start – I just didn't know. So I remember just sitting.

Ann told me:

We had never been homeless – I always had a roof over our heads [until arriving in Minnesota]. With the way that I was brought up and raised, and this is just to tell the truth, I never had a need growing up – I just didn't. My dad and stepmother handled their business, I didn't do it as well as I should have and, of course, my husband didn't so therefore as we tried to stay there with our family it just wasn't possible. We needed to leave, we needed to try to get somewhere where we could do better. My baby sister was here already and she had been saying that Minnesota was a great state for mothers and children. She had tried to convince me about five [years before] or so... you know, some years back, but I just wasn't ready.

So by 2005, I believe, I thought I was ready. I said, "We've got to go." And so we made the plans to pool the money together and leave. When we got here, we realized that we needed to stay here at least 30 days before we could get any kind of support and so when we got here my baby sister was here. Well, of course, she wasn't willing to open her doors up for five people – my whole clan. So she quickly found somewhere for us to be. I said, "I don't know what to do, what should we do?" So she told me quickly about Dorothy Day. Got there and felt like I had died and gone to hell – and so did my children. It scared them to death being from the South. And, I remember, in particular, my son... Jason was

about five years old at that time and he wanted to go to the bathroom and I said, “Where’s the sign?” He said, “There it is, mom.” I said, “Go ahead.”

He went to the bathroom and this gentleman spoke up, he said, “Ma’am.” I said, “Yes, sir.” “Ma’am, you shouldn’t do that.” And so he went in with my son because my husband had gone to take care of our luggage and so he said, “Ma’am, you can’t do that here.” So he went to make sure that my son used the bathroom and came out and explained to me where I was. And I began to get scared, I didn’t want my children to see how scared I was – they were already crying because they were just devastated. And then we spoke to someone about... someone said something about a family place. I said, “A family place?” They said, “The Family Place.” They said, “Oh, that’s a shelter somewhere where you could go to be.” And so I tried to call and there wasn’t an opening so they said that we had to stay there at Dorothy Day. But then as they told us we had to stay there, they also told us that my husband and I had to be separated. I said, “Oh my God, that can’t be.” Because I knew I needed his help and because of my physical challenges and needing help with the children. I said, “That just can’t be.” And they just insisted that my husband could not stay with us but the Father intervened as He often does on my behalf, touched someone’s heart who was in charge. We ended up staying in the library at Dorothy Day for a couple of nights and the person in charge of those nights that we were there, said, “Oh, no, there’s no way that you can be here alone, you need your husband – you need your husband with you.” And I said, “Thank you.” So someone went and got him and said, “Sir, you can stay here with your family.” I said, “Oh Father, thank you.”

So He [God] worked that out and so we ended up... after we left there, we finally called The Family Place and we were able to get in there and it was like a godsend. We were just so happy to be there and it just felt more like home once we did get there, to The Family Place, and it turned out that we had to stay there, The Family Place, during the day and at night we had to go to a church where we could be together. So we were fine as long as we were together. But we... I suppose we were homeless. We were homeless in the sense that we did not have a home of our own but we felt more like we were in transition and the others were homeless and we weren't actually homeless – but in a sense, we were homeless because we didn't have a place of our own. And then as we settled in, especially myself settled in, the Holy Ghost began to deal with me because I began to have issues about being there. I didn't like it, didn't want it at first. I felt like, "I shouldn't be here." And then I started blaming my husband why we were there. And then the Holy Ghost began to deal with me about... because once he told me a road that I had to travel and this is part of that road, the road has not changed, you're still on that road. And so, I began to allow the Holy Ghost to administer to my heart and mind about where I was and where I needed to be and begin to grow past my issues about being there and began to look at The Family Place for what it was – because my stepmother had taught me to see a thing and call it what it was, don't fix things because she always said that there was a thin line between reality and what's real. She always made it clear to us that we could not play around with what was real and what wasn't. And so I had to begin to eat the whole roll of what was going on with me and so I began to... instead of resenting

The Family Place I began to appreciate it. And because I was beginning to appreciate The Family Place, I began to pray for the residents there because I began to feel like I was one of them. And because I began to feel like I was one of them, I thought it was my... I had a responsibility to lend myself to it and that's what I did. That's what I did.

Lastly, Toya told me:

I emancipated myself, Ms. Margaret, when I went and busted the Department of Children and Family Services out in front of the whole court. I was in to spare no feelings, my parents used to tell us, "If you have something on your mind, you need to say it, don't never be holding that on to your chest because by the time it do come out, you never know how it's going to come out, you never know the outcome." And so, like I said, I was tired. So after that, I got transferred up to West Dundee, did not go back to high school, tried to start hair school – that's when I started trying to go to school for hair because that's what I liked to do. I found peace in doing hair and nails. I used to experiment on my own stuff when I was 11 and so my foster mom found a school that was a few blocks away and I would go there... it was a small school, so it was like 6-7 students. But the owner was very nice, I liked her – I liked Nancy. She was very nice. She was one of those intense women – like she took this thing seriously but she wasn't a bitch about it. So if I messed up, I knew I didn't have to worry about her being like, "No, no, no, no, no, this is not right." No, she came and actually showed me how to do finger waves with one comb and two fingers. So, I'm 17... no, I was going to be 17, so I'm not quite 17 yet.

So I'm 16 and I'm up here in hair school, I'm still not seeing my daughter, and this time it was not because of the state. It was because my foster mother said she did not want any babies at her house during the time that her father was visiting from Russia. Oh, no – this isn't going to work, this isn't going to work at all. Nope, I'm not doing this, I'm not going to have the runaround, after all the people that had came up here, we sat out this plan and everything and then you wait until these people pull off and tell me that my daughter still can't come here because your father is coming from Germany to visit - are you serious?

OK. I see I need to pull out yet another one of those long-handed wooden spoons because this is how far I'm going to mess with you – you need to stay a distance from me. I called them, packed up all my stuff. I called the... there was an agency that was working with me before I got shipped from Kankakee and it's called IAG, the Individual Advocacy Group. I met a lot of wonderful ladies and they came in... they were supposed to be working with the state but the owner of the corporation, I don't think she was digging what a lot of the things that the state was doing and so they had a teeny-weeny connection between themselves and the state. The only connection they had with the state was that they were going to report our progress. Anything else that they did with us for her was not the state's concern.

They was legit and everything, I liked the program. This corporation had two separate programs – so they had one program for this set of children and then they had another program for the children that had the...you could tell that they had the mental disabilities. So they had a program for... I forgot what word they

used but it was a nice word. It was a nice word – they didn't call them what we normally call those with mental impairments. And so, that was a great program and that program... that's when I started to open back up. They had to bust through that hut that I had built around myself – messing with the state I had built a fort. So I was a walking fort, I did not let anybody get close to me – if you tried, you would just bounce right off. I was not interested in making any new friends, none of that. I would sit in my room. I had a routine – I would sit in my room, when one of the IAG workers would come and work with me for my GED – we did that, she left, I would go back up to my room. I had a lot of goals back then and when they came and took my baby away from me, I just dropped everything.

Summation of Interviews

There are many threads that are negative, i.e., poor choices, lack of community support, systems that are painful, but all of the families carry a strong thread of hope. *Hope* is their legacy for their children; *Hope* means there is a better tomorrow; *Hope* is the way in which they will be the harbinger for sincere discussions to combat homelessness in the community.

Systems of social service support and entitlement programs think of “clients” as numbers. Rarely are people like the women I interviewed asked to tell their story. Social workers can probably recite the number of children in foster care, or can they share with you the horrific stories or circumstances of a child like Toya. The medical field (especially physicians for women) will reveal their lack of concern, such as in the case of

Rita, who was told that if she sought a second opinion that she should not return to that facility for care.

The *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women* says the home is a great protector of abusers—that was certainly the case for Toya and Joanna. Who listens to a young child who has been molested by a family member when the family will not step up to protect the child?

Preskill and Brookfield (2009) say leadership is based on observing what is happening around you. Through it all, these women are at the tip of the iceberg, with so much more hidden from view; yet they have survived to tell and share their stories. They are the truth tellers. All of them (not only Rita) could be in leadership roles. As I watched them in shelter, I began to see a common thread; they were the women who sat back and observed what was going on around them. They were the women who were not satisfied with what was happening in their lives and they set out to make things different for their children and themselves. They are the women who understood the value of community. They were the women who reached out to other parents while they were in shelter.

Ann would sit in the hall and tell me what was happening with the staff or between the family members in the shelter. It was the same role her father charged her with as a child. He would call on her to tell him the truth of any issues. “Ann, tell me what is going on here” and she would tell him. Yes, it caused hardship and separated her from her siblings, but she was and is a truth teller.

Rita, as a child, looked around and saw the people in her neighborhood. She said that she wanted to be a teacher. She was a preschool teacher for many years; working with Head Start and later with children who were infected with HIV.

All the women I interviewed had the characteristics of a leader. John Shoup (2005) points out that a leader is one who is trusted and who is willing to speak for one's self and others.

Toya learned that if she did not speak for herself, she would have dire consequences, which she was not willing to accept.

To strengthen their position in the community, both Toya and Joanna returned to school as adults to increase their effectiveness as they grow and take on more responsibilities. Patty has chosen to become an active member in her church, serving meals to those in the community who are poor and in need. Rita is an elected state official and is serving her community through policy making and positive political agendas.

Chapter Five: Narratives of Hope

The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice, there is little we can do to change; until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.

R. D. Laing

The unadulterated i.e., *real* story equates to the propensity of the community to hide from the ugliness. The ugliness is not caring what happens in the neighborhood. Streetwise folks say “Snitches get stitches” as a threat to silence those who might inform. Yet how can the solution be found when the truth is not told? The truth will set the community free: free from debilitating systems and from negative mayhem that stifles growth individual and collective growth.

In listening to the five women, the stories reinforced the importance and the rationale for validating the narratives of women in poverty. They have the answers to the solutions. They have not failed to notice injustices that currently abound in government entitlement programs. But then ask any person who has had to survive on welfare, they will tell you the same thing: they have noticed the failures of the system; they have lived with inequalities. What I learned or knew about poverty has been expanded and the real story can never be a fairy tale, because it is the real thing.

Perhaps I should say that social service systems invent nightmarish, negative stories, in particular about women receiving government support. They are perceived as poor, undereducated women, the welfare moms who only take from the system. They are not routinely viewed for their strengths, vitality, cunning awareness, or their ability to be change agents. If allowed, poor women could give back and perhaps even work to fix the system that is long overdue for transformation. The five women I interviewed should to

be heard. Higher education systems could welcome these women into their classrooms, not to tell their stories, but to hear their insights on possible system renovation and the building of community awareness practices.

There is positive information coming from emerging countries and the use of micro lending programs that empower and support women as they create business or community services. The outcome of the support is visible growth and development in the community. Women taking part in the new ventures have a vested interest not only in their families but in the entire community.

There is a history of failing to notice the complications of homelessness. Homelessness is much more than an accumulation of letters that make up a compounded word; it conjures up various images for the general public. When I think of the word, I envision children of all ages with their families. Others think of the unkempt person on a street corner with a sign begging for money and a message asking God's blessing be granted to the giver. Some imagine an intoxicated person grizzled and unshaven. Still many others think of "them" only as a number or at the end of the week the reason they receive a paycheck.

Whatever the state of a person renamed as homeless, we, as a community have consciously or unconsciously packed away our own definition of what homelessness entails. The research for this dissertation was created to assist myself and others to understanding that there are a myriad of issues that encapsulate the concept. The reasoning and rationale of why a person becomes homeless is important. There is relevancy in how and why community must unpack the issues with care, hope, and

understanding. It is necessary to circumvent our old ways of thinking to achieve new solutions.

Children are born with the ability to be resilient, bouncing as high as possible. I compare them to a rubber ball; full of air, ready to spring beyond any prescribed limitations. But after many uses (positive/negative), air escapes and the recoil goes away. Some children have parents who own an air pump and a needle; they have no problems refilling. Other parents have the ability to take the ball to a filling station for a refill. But then there are the unfortunate children who are not privy to these resourceful parents. Their balls go flat, gets left in a corner, no longer able to be joyful.

This does not mean that a flattened ball cannot be revived; it can. It takes a family who can disassociate themselves from chaos, a loving community, and a well-intentioned school system in order to bring the bounce back.

The women I interviewed were all bouncing balls, ready to continue to make a difference in their lives and their spheres of influence, but the negative labels routinely pasted place by entitlement programs (stigmatization), had challenged them.

George Lakoff (2002), explained in the book: *Moral Politics* that conservatives think systems coddle people and make them morally weak. This weakness is seen as immoral. Elizabethan laws divided the worthy (who deserve support) vs. the unworthy (who are a drain on society). The stigmatization regarding poverty has deep societal roots. Yet the women in the study have overcome all the inappropriate titles, all the negative innuendoes, and all the policies that have tested their existence.

The research journey for this dissertation started when I was forced to erase any pre-conceived ideas of what I knew about homelessness. Twenty-five years ago, my

daughter's Girl Scout den leader scheduled a volunteer activity for the troop to serve a meal at the Dorothy Day Center. The guidelines for age qualifications changed, and ten year olds were not allowed to serve. The leader asked the parents to go in their place.

It was shocking to see small children lined up for a free meal. For the first time, I saw children from my community hungry and parents who were unable to satisfy the family's need for food.

Twenty-five years ago, there were teens waiting to be fed at Dorothy Day. I became acutely aware of what I had failed to notice. The world I lived in took on a new look. The journey of understanding the needs of others began in my childhood and reared its head that day, as I served to those in need.

Since that time, I continue to be appalled by the social catastrophe that limits financial stability for families—mishaps that sustain generational poverty. I wonder why the circumstances of poverty have not been contested or eradicated. Generational poverty hinges on generational family chaos. I define chaos as being out of control. This lack of control influences the entire family. Soon the chaotic behavior becomes the norm that becomes a legacy; passed down to future generations.

The women in this study could have all bowed to such an outcome, but they didn't. Instead they found solace or comfort through positive relationships, their own strength, and/or a caring community. That is how they have responded.

A New Way to Revamp Poverty

While researching this dissertation, I have become even more aware of valid avenues that portend the availability to change conditions and pursue a new road to better

solutions to curtail poverty. Some solutions have been born from global needs, and others because of local needs. Currently, there are practices being constructed by future-minded scholars who are assisting people in emerging countries to remediate their issues. The course of action is called Science of Delivery. This scientifically examines what works, why, and where. One of the prominent tools used to assess is called local knowledge.

Internationally, the first step upon entering a country is to pose the questions to local residents: “What is the problem?” “What is needed?” The next step is to listen. In listening, scientist can then determine how best to work with the information and together with the community arrive at a viable solution to the problem.

This is counter-intuitive to the current practices, whereby first world countries delivering aid open with a statement: “This is what we are going to do for you.” This formula takes away the need to aid in self-preservation and negates resourcefulness of the community, intact systems that work, and the empowerment of individuals who comprise communities.

At The Family Place, we are making changes. When a family enters our site, the staff has a new personalized script to follow. First, there is the welcoming invitation, which says: *We are glad you are here. Are you comfortable? Are you thirsty or hungry?*

Then the staff introduces themselves, their position and how long they have been with The Family Place. They are free to converse with as much personal divulging as they deem comfortable. The new family is given a brightly colored welcoming brochure; in the past, they were handed a plain sheet of paper containing detailed information.

The families are then asked if they are willing to share information about themselves. The Family Place receives personal stories about the families via a less threatening process.

Under the confines of the county system, we followed directives to gather multiple pages of statistical data and rules and regulations that had to be signed, dated, and filed. The family was responsible for remembering what was being expected of them. This corporate style of intake inherently separated staff from clients. Intake became unnecessarily adversarial. The change in procedure makes it possible for staff and the families, at the point of welcome, to come to a better understanding of each other.

I perceive the new procedure of receiving families as a combination of several tactics. The old concept of Taylorism, management theory that studied process and movement combined with phenomenology, or learning about those receiving services, and local (personal) knowledge that first asks about the incoming family's narrative. This reinforces the fact that their story is important; their humanness is significant. For that moment in time, Goffman would say, they are center stage and that family has the starring role.

This is as important to the psyche as any other one thing that The Family Place does to make a family who is experiencing transitioning to a new home more bearable.

Additional Background

This dissertation grew out of contemplative thought regarding people in poverty, especially families with children. Incurring change is vital to the narrative of those who have experienced the devastation of homelessness. *Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story*

of Homelessness, shares the story of how the five women interviewed overcame the mishap.

Unpacking the issues is both complex and tedious. There is not one solution, because every story is unique. Unfortunately, the bottom line is that multiple issues of poverty still prevail. System changes, intended to meet the needs of those in need, are slow to occur and antiquated entitlements are prevalent. It is easiest to point an accusing digital at financial poverty; but there are other contributors that must to be considered. Standing in the forefront are five blockades to change:

1. the poverty mentality in the field of education, due to the fact poor children often are not privy to quality education;
2. available information regarding community services is inadequate;
3. obsolete social service systems that prescribe one solution for many fail to meet the needs of those for whom programs are designed;
4. health/medical standards have relational affects to poverty;
5. inadequate, cost effective housing is not available.

Ann, born with Cerebral Palsy, has an active imagination and feels if her body was not crippled, she could be in a better place in life. She was corralled into an education standard based on her physical disability, not her mental aptitude.

Homelessness is about poverty, but also important is the lack of a caring community. Bishop Desmond Tutu is quoted in GoodRead Quotes as saying, “Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.” The solution is not a one fix for all. It is discovering how each person finds their own remedies to situations. It is about community listening to individual

biographical accounts. It is the profound connection of understanding the power of personal knowledge.

The first question centered on my research project recognized the themes that emerged from childhood memories of the five African Americans whom I interviewed. I identified ten major ideas, but focused on five themes. I found that the other topics became subsets of the major themes. The subject matters seemed to roll into one another, much like balls rolling down an inclined thoroughfare; where one appeared the others were sure to follow.

Emerging themes from the African American women who experienced poverty and homelessness were disclosed through the narratives of childhood memories, mid-life conversations, and today's reality for their lives. The qualitative stories of the women validated the negative power of entitlement systems that vilify and curtail transformative growth. Validation of experiences can identify solutions to poverty that ultimately alleviate some of the root causes of homelessness.

This dissertation stems from my personal experiences of working in social services for twenty years, while appreciating the childhood memories. In 2001 I organized and became the founder of The Family Place; a day center in St. Paul offering services and programs to families experience homelessness.

The Family Place History, Mission and Services

The Family Place was incorporated by the State of Minnesota as a 501 (c) (3) on May 10, 2001 and opened its doors on October 1, 2001. The organization was created as a result of an unmet need in the community. Prior to its establishment, there was no safe, appropriate

place for families with children staying in the emergency overflow night shelter program to go during the day.

Daytime programs and services are offered to families utilizing the overnight shelter system. The families seeking services are living in poverty; 100% are poor, 80% are people of color, and 70% are children who range in age from newborn to teenagers. In 2013, The Family Place served over 450 families (1,480 guests) and will more than likely exceed this number in 2014, due to a significant increase in homeless families and the demand for services. The Family Place provides twelve hours of care for families during the day and Project Home provides over night shelter.

For the past thirteen years, the mission of The Family Place has been to meet the immediate needs of Ramsey County families with children who are currently living without a home. The program provides day services including shelter, food, access to basic hygiene/laundry services, along with staff advocates who assist families as they connect with community programs to help them obtain housing, health care, legal assistance, and employment. Over the years, these core services have met the needs of the majority of families who come through our doors. During this time the staff is actively working to get children back in their home school, and they help connect the parents to community services, permanent housing or transitional housing programs.

Current Programs

The Family Place focuses on stabilizing homeless families and helping them to achieve self-sufficiency. The services provided by the organization include:

- Meeting the basic needs of food, shelter, and safety during daytime hours
- Initially placing families in shelter and then helping them locate permanent or transitional housing
- Assisting families with completing applications for a variety of assistance programs
- Nurturing the children and providing enrichment activities
- Helping to locate employment opportunities for parents
- Provide parent life skills training
- Returning children to their home school within three days
- Addressing barriers to family success and long-term stability

While at The Family Place, each person is treated with respect and dignity. We realize each person has strengths, assets, and the potential to change their current situation for the better. We also believe every person deserves a home, especially families; therefore we are establishing better services for the families. It is important for the entire family, especially the children, to change the revolving door cycle of homelessness.

The creation of The Family Place with services for families did not just spring into my head overnight. The idea of hospitality or welcoming the stranger was bred into me by my family, the community, and positive experiences throughout my adult life.

My Personal Growth and Development

I have a deeper understanding of how and why my parents supported me as I expanded my worldview. They encouraged me to investigate the community in which I lived. Through the love of reading, I was able to explore other circumstances outside of my family and community. Even though they often limited my exploration for my own safety, my mind was free to wander. They sustained my need to read by allowing me to take solo bus trips to the St. Paul Public Library. There I found the magnificent Skinner Room, with shelves filled with books and reading cubbies. My parents saved so I could go on the senior high school trip to New York and Washington D.C., where I experienced staying in a hotel for the first time. My parents allowed me to change my religious affiliation at the age of ten from Methodist to Catholic. These may seem like trivial accomplishments, but they are stepping stones to becoming the person I am today.

Over the years, I have connected my own childhood memories but was keenly curious as to how the families I work with connect to their own life experiences. More importantly, how do the children in shelter with their parents look back on their experience of not having their own home? Many of the children—no different than children who have a home—have the potential to succeed; however, too often, I also see that poverty has the power to stymie that potential, leading them down another path.

The women interviewed have the capability to influence the community in which they live. They can convey the importance of their experiential knowledge regarding poverty and homelessness.

Authors highlighted in the literature review have the propensity to meld their academic standards and relational value to those interviewed. This chapter is ripe with

personal strengths that I gained from childhood, a caring family, and the community. The five women interviewed and I have emotional historical connections. Even though we did not have similar experiences, as I have never been homeless, we shared commonalities include our blackness and our respect for family. Our historical experiences are binding sediments that are an integral part of all fairytales. Dislodging yourself from homelessness is an important real story adventure.

In the end, we are all of one voice; we all want the best for the family and community locally, nationally, and worldwide. There is a theory that if a butterfly flaps its wings in one place, that flapping can have an effect in other places. If a child cries out in the night, we should all hear the cry.

I Come From

I come from a time when things simmered and stewed
When meals cooked all day
and problems were solved over weeks and sometimes months or years.
When quick fixes were rare and change was slow and appreciated.

I come from parents who used well-worn sayings that helped me grow into womanhood, for if their advice was relevant on a spring day in May, it would still be viable on a winter morning in November.

I come from a time when instant messaging was talking over the backyard fence
and a new wardrobe was someone else's hand-me-downs.
I come from a time when clocks seemed to move slower, days were longer, friendships were cherished and the only place to play was outside.

I come from a time when leaders were revered and went to church every Sunday.
I come from a time.

Margaret Lovejoy

Throughout this dissertation, I have found value in the words and wisdom of those interviewed and the authority of the authors reviewed. My wisdom springs from the

distinctive sayings that were spoken to me by my parents, grandmother, and teachers. As I write the last chapter of this dissertation, I find it imperative to incorporate my experiences and life memories into the milieu, as a point in grounding why I chose to write a qualitative narrative on childhood memories and the wisdom from those who inspired me.

Using the metaphor of the tree is important to describe how family, community, and church are in the forefront of shaping the lives of children. The axioms gained from family and community can be loosely defined, but they offered definite guides for the direction that I have followed (and use today) to manifest changes in how I relate to people and my desire to promote change. Foundational strength from my family made it possible to evaluate and make modifications that are important in my life.

While studying at the University of St. Thomas, I have critically reflected on the path of learning, compared it to the theorists, and imagined what is needed to strengthen my skills through innovative actions and plausible reactions to injustices. As a member of the community, I have observed unfairness that even when witnessed does not command action.

Throughout this dissertation, I have chosen the tree as the metaphor that delineates growth, phenomenological that connected me to the inner lives of the women and the crystallization as my methodology to define the power of how re-fractured light can change the look of a simple story. Quoting Richardson and St. Pierre as cited in Creswell (2013):

Crystals grow, change and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different

colors, patterns and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of response... (p. 249)

The narratives from those interviewed, resemble the refracted beauty of the crystal. During the interviews, the same questions were asked, but the responses were varied and personal. Elements of a similar theme, depending on the narrator, take on a different way of defusing the light.

I consider my studies to be important because they have allowed me to brand myself as a change agent, working for the good of the community. This dissertation is a culmination of my studies. It has allowed me to invest in the smaller picture in order to bring validation to the larger picture. Engagement in critical thinking and dialog with educators and peers has enabled me to clarify my role in the community and my chosen profession. I have obtained information that allows me to reflect on my strengths and codify my weaknesses. Even though the role of change agent is important, I also identify myself as a servant leader, standing in the background, making sure others are heard and their needs are met.

At first, I concluded the two roles, that of change agent and servant leader, were contradictory, but now I find they are complimentary and critical for the development of successful social service programs geared to meeting a human need. The position allows me to remain off stage center; that's the place for actors. Erving Goffman contends that in a performance, we all have our places and roles. The women interviewed have fine tuned the qualities needed to be successful. Rita has chosen to be a political figure in the community. Joanna, in social services, finds ways to help the families in her care to make changes in their lives. Toya encourages success in the children for whom she cares.

Myles Horton (1998), founder of Highlander School, trained activists to increase their awareness of changes for humanity. His mother, a strong influence taught him:

It's the principle of trying to serve people and building a loving world. If you believe that people are of worth, you can't treat anybody inhumanely, and that means you not only have to love and respect people, but you have to think in terms of building a society that people can profit from, and that kind of society has to work on the principle of equality. Otherwise somebody's going to be left out. (p. 7)

Nelson Mandela's seeking change and the end of apartheid for South Africa helped me understand the need to be present for all groups of people to listen intently and act for the good of others. Foucault deepened my understanding of observation and how it can be used as a negative or a positive. He illuminated the phenomenon of prisons in cities and how community members stopped seeing the institutions located in their midst. It is similar for those studying history. Foucault (1980) writes in his book *Power and Knowledge* that history is making visible what was unseen, making it visible; to be effective, we must use a magnifying lens. A change agent must be able to see what is happening to understand the deeper aspects of history. Ronald Takaki (1993), in *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, writes history with that type of magnifier. I admire the re-telling of history through his unique wit, as he reminds readers that dramatic changes of America's demography will alter how we think.

By understanding the inequalities that have been omitted from mainline textbooks, it is my hope that we will not continue to make the same errors that negate

humane treatment of others. As a servant leader, it is imperative to understand the might of power and control. Sociologists map the changes we have experienced and critical thinkers and pedagogical educators have given us guidelines that highlight the power and talents of leadership through sharing knowledge.

I did not come into the program or delve into this dissertation as a blank slate. Those whom I interviewed had well formed memories. They were in tune to injustices that occurred in their lives and in their communities. We all have a history of circumstances that have supported our roles as leaders and change agents. Childhood stories are personal accounts of history. The remembered narratives too often are devalued in the public arena. There are multiple memory senses that can be used to validate personal history.

In the novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, written by Betty Smith (1947), Francie, the protagonist (six years old), experiencing her first day in school, understands that she will never be the teacher's pet. Born of immigrant Irish parents at the turn of the twentieth century in New York City, she had the world against her. The children of business families were seated in the front rows of the classroom, in clean dresses and hair tied in silk ribbons, while those born in poverty were squeezed in the back of the room and begrudgingly given a pencil and books to share.

We may have slightly more sophisticated means of separation for families in poverty today, but the women interviewed could relate to the systems that deem they are not as good as others; inequality is just as prevalent today as the early 1900's.

Memories That Lead to Change

Just as Francie, in the novel, recalled the harrowing experience of the first day of school, the women interviewed had a plethora of memories that led to change and ultimately to an inner strength gained from the memory. Rita recalled the memory of smell. After a fire in their apartment building, the teacher talked to her and her mother about the smell of Rita's clothing. This as a learning lesson taught Rita she could trust the teacher. Ann narrated the memory of movement by telling me about her first steps at the age of six. With these first steps, she demonstrated her own power to illicit change. Joanna remembers the taste of her grandmother's Chess Pie. It still evokes a warm response of care that is mired in a troublesome childhood.

Even though these experiences were highlights in their lives, they all still remembered those times in which they were made to feel second class and relegated to the back of the preverbal classroom. Toya's loss of her first child to the system and Joanna hiding her pregnancy from her own mother's wrath reflected how they both feared labeling that was unjustified and painful.

People in poverty experience a great deal of loss, both physical and emotional. Loss can be painful. The pain can be defined as losing connections. The forfeiting of a home, moving away from a community, and loss of household possessions and clothing add to grief. Joanna confided about the loss of her grandson and the grief that ensued.

In the twenty years that I have been working with people in poverty, only a handful of children in transition have come into shelter with a favorite "blanky." Perhaps they have had few opportunities to connect to a special piece of material in their ever-changing worlds. Those who did have a blanky were fiercely attached. In all the wildness

of loss after loss, the blanky is a piece of solid reality; perhaps, each child should have one to calm any ailing souls.

The power of grief is often hidden behind a façade that was erected around crumbling innards. All those interviewed talked about loss in different ways; the death of a parent, love withheld because of parental insecurities, divorce or social service systems that take control.

Families in poverty experience untold medical tragedies. The media advises its viewers to feel better, perform at the max or hide embarrassing conditions by taking a pill. Just ask your doctor about the advertised medication. The reality is medical care is triaged in an emergency room, not by a personal physician. The medical staff has limited time or interest in talking about a pill as seen on TV. Loss and grief deeply hidden, manifests itself with a constantly gnawing tenderness that could never be nullified by a pill.

This chapter incorporates the power and passion of diverse voices, along with the beatitudes that foster the evolution toward making a difference in the lives of others. In many ways, I resonant with the women I interviewed especially related to memory and the importance of making a difference. In our early years, neither the women, nor I thought of us as possessors of outstanding traits. But as I completed the interviews I could see how Ann was highly regarded as a peace keeper in her family. Rita found ways to continue her education by looking at how she was established in her community. As a teenager Rita loved her job. It helped her stay involved in her neighborhood. We all thought of ourselves not as outstanding role models, but as followers.

I wanted to think of myself as a writer and an observer of things around me. Those who see and think with critical eyes add the possibility of passion to life, and when their voices are heard they demand passion. Throughout my life, I made positive differences for myself and for those with whom I came into contact. The world of passion and possibilities loomed in the forefront of my mind.

Perhaps there are some strategic differences with those interviewed who had the strong desire to make changes happen that ultimately influenced others. Toya, even as a young teen, carefully monitored the role of how social service programs worked in her life. Her passion was fighting for the right to raise her child, and also the right to raise herself. Today she is involved in caring for others.

More often than not, the power of passion is placed on an emotional back burner. There was a relationship to the idea of how and why the nursery rhyme character Humpty-Dumpty stayed on the wall feeling safe and protected. As a follower he would have stayed whole, in one piece, with no cracks or holes.

The interviewees and myself had various types of life crises. Some of us experienced changes in relationships, work, or family violence. We had to re-think the position of sitting on the safety of the wall perch. Patty was living in an uncomfortable relationship. Toya, as a teenage mother, was being discounted by social services. Ann was living in a cult and being brainwashed. We all saw that sitting on the wall was harmful. But jumping off into the fray took courage. It meant that the shell of safety would crack, even perhaps split wide open, allowing those around us to see our true value, and we all knew that all the king's horses and all the king's men would never put

Humpty together again. Once the truth of injustices is seen, nothing can erase the need to respond with fervor.

Reflecting back to the image of the tree is a point in which youth, illustrated as the roots, and the attributes of young adulthood, noted as the sturdy base extending from the roots, begin to experience the offerings of life. Surely there will be errors that occur that often give tree trunks a gnarled characteristic—missteps caused by limbs breaking off during a storm or by an adventurous climber. The scars are the challenges that must be overcome.

My change occurred when I was offered the position as the director of an overnight emergency shelter program. This proposal came after the culmination of several short lived employment opportunities that included being the director of six branches of community services for the Minneapolis Red Cross; an assistant to the director of the Women's Program at Metropolitan State University; a two year contract as program director with Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center in Washington state; and working with low income families through a federally funded program. The positions gave me a limited degree of responsibilities, and always under the supervisory eye of an Executive Director.

When the St. Paul Area Council of Churches (SPACC) offered me the job as director of The Homeless Program, I was working with an Executive Director who made the decisions; again, I was in a secondary position. I made recommendations; he made the final determinations. I was comfortable in this; it supported my strengths of being a good follower. I had a secure place on the wall right next to the intact vestiges of Humpty.

When I was hired in 1996, it never occurred to me that this tiny program, which had slipped under the provision of SPACC, would transform me from sitting comfortably on a wall, gazing out into a world filled with social injustices, to the middle of a conundrum for which there are no answers or solutions. The position brought with it the emotional tack hammer that cracked my shell and pushed me off the secure wall into an unfair world. Working with homeless families carried me well beyond followership and catapulted me into the front lines. I started witnessing the inadequacies of a social welfare system gone awry and became uncomfortably and acutely aware that reform was necessary.

The front line is more than learning a position. It is leadership. For me the position had been inspired by family, community, and the church. It was the slow simmering process that created the possibility of passion that manifested into leadership. I believe the foundation of leadership is knowledge based on systems that have the propensity to educate verses teaching. As a child, my informal learning from my parents and the community was just as important as the formal school setting. I have a deep respect for my parent's home spun theorizing. Their examples of caring for humankind remain valuable learning lessons that were instrumental in building character, stability, and the potential for leadership.

My mother demonstrated the value of preserving human dignity. The 1950's brought about economic disaster to the workforce. WWII ended and employment that had supported the war effort closed. Men living without work took to traveling the country in a search for stability. They were labeled as hobos. There is an interesting difference

between the homeless folks of today who accept money thrust out to them from an open car window and the hobos of my youth.

In the past, the homeless wayfarers knocked on the door and asked for work in exchange for a meal. As they swept the sidewalk or the garage or cleaned up the trash area, my mother would prepare a tray of food. Usually the meal was an assortment of leftovers. After the chores were completed my mother could have given out a couple of coins and shooed them away, but she didn't. Instead she displayed the utmost care in serving the drifters. A clean towel covered the tray that was set with silverware, a china plate, and a large glass of milk or a cup of coffee. (This was before disposable dishes and plastic-ware). On the side of the tray, she would place a few coins, not much, probably ten or fifteen cents. Included with the hot meal she packed a bag lunch for the road. When she served the meal, she told us to go inside. Inside meant I could not gawk or ask questions to satisfy my curiosity.

As I think back on these scenarios, even though we were not well to do, my mother was sharing out of her perception of abundance; we had more than the hobos and division was status quo. She taught me that if I cared for strangers, I would always have solid connections to reality.

Future Directions of a Revamped System of Shelter Care:

An Innovative Look at the Extended Services

A new look at shelter will include programs designed to successfully transition families with children from shelter to new homes. Through a focused curriculum designed to address the multiple issues of abject poverty, the program (1) builds on a

family's current skills to improve self-awareness, (2) strengthens community ties, (3) empowers, and (4) provides tools that will ultimately equate to long-term familial stability—eradicating generational chaos and eradicating homeless reoccurrences, one family at a time.

Goals of Revamping Services

As The Family Place seeks to revamp how shelter can have better outcomes, there are various changes that have been created to positively enhance the experiences of families caught in the clash of homelessness.

The first step is a resolve to gain a better understanding of the negative attributes of language and how words can be used to dissuade or encourage change. Therefore the staff at The Family Place no longer categorizes families as clients, which is a clinical term, or as homeless, which can evoke harsh, negative insinuations. Instead, those in shelter are referred to as *families in transition who are participating in programs and services at The Family Place*. Language has a significant impact on the experiences of families, if they are recognized only as being homeless. That one expression can nullify all the other attributes of a family. Therefore, it is vital to replace negative terminology with positive inferences. Families without a home have a multitude of gifts and talents that may not be recognized, if the first defining description of a family is “homeless.”

Next, I saw a need to establish a new type of programming for The Family Place. The new direction will enhance, while incorporating, the importance of family stability. This new concept has begun by enlisting the support of formerly homeless individuals to tell us what would have helped them to gain stability when they were in shelter. The

established Focus Group Project was organized to make sure the curriculum design for the learning center is in tune with the needs of families in shelter.

By using information from the focus groups, a meaningful curriculum, demonstrated in Table 1,) will be designed to support families as they gain knowledge of what is needed to stabilize their family. The goal is to help the parents understand their inner spirit, while aiding in the growth and development of their children. Another goal is to stimulate a desire to build healthy personal and community relationships that encourages success. The groups will be led by a facilitator, and the curriculum is being organized by a project manager.

Each group will have its own time to meet and discuss needs for success in the design of the learning process. Focus groups will be comprised of various groups including:

- Mothers 18 to 25
- Mothers 26 +
- Single Fathers
- 2 Parent Families
- Grandparents/Caregivers
- GLBT Couples
- Children's Input

Community participants will be invited in to listen to the focus group conversations. Together, they will establish the most meaningful curriculum practices. Community listeners may be from various fields and areas of interest. They may include people from:

- Health and Wellness
- Finance
- Education
- Community Leadership
- Spiritual Support
- Work Force
- Corporations
- Management Companies

The changes and transitions ultimate goal is to create the extended shelter program. The “new look of shelter” will include programs designed to successfully transition families with children from shelter to a new home with long-term stability as the primary goal.

The last of the major changes in program design is to add Montessori care on site. This is educational based childcare that promotes independence while caring for the child’s physical, emotional and psychological development.

Extended Shelter Program: An Innovative Look at Service

For many years, I have seen people languish under the present policies and programs designed to fit everyone’s needs. The concept of extending shelter stay comes from my observations as a social service provider and a doctoral student in educational leadership. It is promoted through the wise words of educators, and theorists whom I studied, and my dissertation research.

Extended shelter with a curriculum grounded in aiding those to find stability does not exist in Ramsey County. Extended stay in shelter will attempt to transition families with children from shelter to a new home. With longer term shelter stays, school age children will experience fewer missed days. It is established that children who have regular attendance records have better academic outcomes. Currently, if a child is in shelter, it is possible to miss as many as twelve days of school in a two-month period.

This new approach to community-powered problem solving identifies needs and sets goals by developing a meaningful and responsive curriculum. The innovative solution begins with a four month training that addresses life skills, so that families can move beyond poverty. Life coaches will fill rudimentary holes that were lost or left unfilled during the upbringing process.

The intended design of the extended shelter stay will be a calmer living situation conducive to fulfilling a more positive learning experience intended to help the entire family work toward future successes. This is an innovative approach to ending the cycle of homelessness one family at a time.

The program will be an invitational service for families who want to make changes in their lives. The concept builds on a family's current skills to improve self-awareness through a focused curriculum designed to address the multiple issues of extreme poverty. It is the vision of the program to expand the family's sphere of influence, their resources, and skills to promote family success with a transition plan designed to concentrate on individual goals to allow the family to integrate into a long-term, healthy community that encourages family success.

The Curriculum

The program builds on a family's current skills to improve self-awareness through a focused curriculum designed to address the multiple issues of poverty. By utilizing the learning skills that highlight independence, prioritizing, accountability, beauty, order, and the power of positive choice, the program will help adults realize their potential by understanding how those principles apply to their lives.

This project will first bring together focus groups of currently or formerly homeless parents to help design the new curriculum. Often, people who have never experienced the heartbreak or anxiety of living without a home end up designing life skill programs. Community advocates will be asked to take part in the planning as listeners.

Each week a new topic will be discussed. Sessions will be interactive and may include field trips to various venues, and presenters from the community with expertise in their field will be invited to come in to share information with the parents.

The program is being designed to keep up with today's technology. Steps to retrofit spaces for educational purposes and utilize today's technology with community partners are in progress. This connection to technology for the participants will lessen the digital divide. Closing the digital divide might not be realistic, but lessening it can only be a positive step for the future of the family. Computers in Schools is supporting the program with technology so each participant will have access to a computer making it possible for most sessions to be paperless.

Daily Schedule

9:00	Arrival and check in
9:15 - 10:15	First Session (current events discussion)
10:30 - 11:30	Second Session
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch

12:30 - 1:30

Third Session

1:30 - 2:30

Fourth Session

Sixteen-Week Session Topics (Example)

Table 1
Session Topics

Session	Description	Targeted Outcome
Self Care and Daily Living	Personal hygiene, mental health evaluations, physical, emotional and psychological care of the entire family	Increased knowledge in the area of self care and daily living
Social Interactions and Networks	The state of relationships both family and beyond	Better communicators
Importance of Education	Addressing formal and informal education/child’s school involvement/ GED completion, training or secondary education	Act on obtaining GED, training or secondary education
Learning Process	Montessori based concepts	Step by step, each step just as important as the previous and the next
Money Management	Financial analysis, explanation of the importance of all aspects of financing	Proficiency in understanding basic financial management
Tenant Issues and Policies	Management companies, landlords, legal aid, home ownership, tenant rights and responsibilities	Increase knowledge
Health and well-being of the Family	Food choices, social outlets, experts on health topics	Importance of exercise and diet; and all aspects of caring for health
How to Work with Emergency Service	ER, Police, fire fighters/CPR and emergency certifications	Increased awareness
Substance and Drug Abuse	Street, over the counter/prescription and legal drugs – the dos and don’t discussion	Importance of healthy choices
Law and Legal Insights	Guest speakers from a number of entities including Legal Aid and SPPD	Increased knowledge
Anger Management	Addressing anger, Identifying triggers	Importance of exercising alternatives to anger
Caring	What does it mean to care for family, friends, environment and the community	Increased empathy awareness of others plight

Session	Description	Targeted Outcome
Stability and Strength of the Family	Foundation that forms solid family structures from a positive perspective	Taping into personal strength for the health of family
Family History of Homelessness	Addressing generational homelessness and recidivism	Stopping the cycle
Value of Work/Volunteerism	Employers expectations, job applications, mock interviews, a detailed look at various industries	Creating a work ethic and strong volunteerism
Dare to Dream	Looking at wealth from a real viewpoint / trading places for a day /breaking out of comfort zones	Experience wealth so that poverty is not the only experience

Chapter Six: Conclusions

I was once told that I was not special; I was aghast by the statement. The person went on to say that if a person thinks of himself or herself as special they stand apart; they are placed on a pedestal away from the fray. Then you cannot be effective. Like Humpty Dumpty, you have to leave the wall. Therefore, the women I interviewed are not special. They are normal, average, African American women who have triumphed over expectations.

The research questions for this dissertation asked for the emerging themes from African American women who have experienced poverty and homelessness, as they disclose childhood memories. The women were initially guided by the questions created for the interview process. The circumstances of the conversation made a big difference in each person's response and the multiple themes that surfaced. The five themes that emerged were:

- The importance of childhood memories in regard to interaction and experiences with parents, siblings, relatives and the community
- Educational experiences
- Childhood health issues or serious injuries
- Experiences with family or community violence
- Violence

It was the foundational cornerstone of the dissertation for the women to share their background before we could delve into their present day circumstances. So much of

who they are today hinges on their view of themselves. In their cases, success all stems from childhood memories.

The second question asks if qualitative stories of homeless African American women validate the negative power of systems that vilify and curtail transformative growth and community health for solutions to poverty that alleviates homelessness. Johnnie Tilmon succinctly identified a root cause by contrasting terms of “a” man vs. “the” man. “The” man is able to vilify those receiving government assistance. All of the five women talked of a time in which “the” man treated them unfairly.

At The Family Place, we have found that transformation of lives can only begin when the narrative is told. The research practices in this dissertation verify the importance of story. When story is recited there is an expectation that the narrative will change the way in which a person thinks of himself/herself. In the case of those interviewed, they all had, at one time in their lives, a person who listened. That could have been a family member, a person from the faith community, or a caring social service provider. Success is possible when the person believes they are successful, and that feeling is then passed on to the children in the family and ultimately the entire community will benefit from that positive feeling of belief.

All five women experienced the acrid vilification of social entitlement systems. They all found invested listeners who enabled them to grow beyond their current situations. The women have grown and prospered because of their potential for achievement that was recognized both in childhood and later as they grew into womanhood. They continue to give back to the community and their family. Currently change in community and state policies is being achieved; family stability is being

honored; the welfare of children is being addressed; and utmost on the minds of all five women is the care and education of family.

There are positive outcomes when society invests time and energy in qualitative narrative. The community and those wanting to make changes in social services and policies must have women with these skill sets on their boards, steering committees, and represented in policy making meetings. It is imperative to take note of how they found success. To my knowledge, none of the women interviewed have children in the penal system, and none of their children (nor themselves) are currently involved in illicit drug use. And all of them exemplify the characteristics of great leaders.

John Shoup (2005) presents seven influences of leadership in his book *A Collective Biography of Twelve World Class Leaders: A Study On Developing Exemplary Leaders*. The women interviewed had many of the same related influences in their lives. Shoup's (2005) list of influences includes:

1. Involved parents
2. A happy childhood
3. Formal and informal education
4. Prodigious patrons
5. Critics and adversaries
6. Apprenticeships and successes
7. Favorable fate

Preskill and Brookfield, in their book *Learning as a Way of Leadership*, write that "Learning how to question is one of the foundational skills of leadership" (2009, p.127). All five of the women learned this lesson early on. Questioning through observation

became key to solving situations that confronted the women throughout their lives. Mere observation can pose the question and offer an answer.

The women are observers and inquisitive by nature. They are all agents of change and servants of humanity. They are interested in the vignettes that make up the big picture.

The five African American women interviewed for this dissertation experienced homelessness. They also told me about their childhoods, their lives as young adults, and their current lives. This sharing of stories is a resource that can and should be utilized to inform and transform in social services structures. The shared information has the potential to create avenues to constructive agendas and new programs. The solutions to overcoming poverty and homelessness are in the stories. All the women worked hard to prevail over the evils of living without a home. They used or are using their educational power to bring to the forefront the meaning of success. Their education was gained from a multitude of sources. Learning to obtain and utilize resources is key to accomplishments. The stories have the propensity to clarify and meet goals in the community.

Beyond the Fairytale: The Real Story of Homelessness is a research project that has allowed five women to share important experiences, some of which were profoundly negative, but which they still overcame.

The research has paired their stories with educators, authors, and resources; all are vital to the health of the family and community. Their memories and current stories are measured up to the biographies of well known and lesser-known individuals. History,

stories, data, and messages can strengthen how we see our place in the family or in the community.

In the asking and the telling of a personal story, strengths and character building attitudes are revealed. These characteristics have the ability to enable the family or the community to be better equipped to care for self and others to insure success. In the words of the late Senator Paul Wellstone, “We all do better, when we all do better.”

Recommendation Plan

The new concept will have visible impact on the families who face homelessness. Primarily because for the first time they will have the support that first identifies the reasons why they became homeless, then continues to educate the individual (via an intense extended stay shelter program) on how to regain and maintain stability.

For most individuals, the newly created curriculum will be life changing as they progress successfully in many areas that were initially hampered or may have never been touched on before. The unique program will offer the life skills training that make it necessary to not only survive but to thrive in today’s fast paced and confusing world. For many of the marginalize populace, there is little hope for catching up--this program bridges that gap, empowering and enabling parents and caregivers. It provides an opportunity to find personal and familial successes; this, in turn, affects the community.

The goal is to curtail homelessness and prevent reoccurring bouts. Both formal and informal education is the key for change. There are those who fell through the cracks, missing out on important life skills. It is up to the innovative and supportive members of the community to listen to what is needed from those affected and insure that it gets done.

The premise of encouraging support is derived from the concept “teach them to fish.” It is fact that if a person is central to his or her own survival, they feel a sense of accomplishment and pride. A main objective is to give families as many tools as needed to achieve the stability required in achieving personal and familial success.

The community is only as strong as its weakest member. This community-powered approach takes those that are experiencing homeless and puts them in the driver’s seat of finding a solution.

Appendix: Information for Participants Interviewed

Name/age	Education level	Work	Family	Place of birth	Marital status	Age of first episode of homelessness
Ann/55	Secretarial Training	Housewife	Three Children	Tennessee	Married for 20 years	47
Joanna/40	Enrolled in community college	Married twice, divorced once	Two children living, one deceased	Wisconsin	Two years into his second marriage	29 and 32
Patty/55	Four year degree	Unemployed because of a disability	Two sons, one 30 years old, the second son is a teenager	Illinois	Widow, husband died this spring	49
Rita/53	Four year degree	State Employee	Seven children	Illinois	Single, divorced	40
Toya/34	Completing a two year degree	Private day care	Four, three living with her, the other lives with her father in another state	Illinois	Single	23

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