

V. Organization and Analysis of the Healing Categories

The previous chapter introduces 14 categories of incidents that facilitated healing for First Nations people along with a preliminary presentation of healing outcomes. This chapter examines four complete narratives in an effort to provide meaning and action to the categories by showing them in context. A preliminary organization of the categories is presented based on this examination as well as a list of themes that emerge in successful First Nations healing.

Narrative Accounts

The following healing stories told by the participants are presented as much as possible in the words of the participants. It was necessary to edit some of the transcripts for the sake of clarity.

Narrative Account # 1

Four or five years ago when my wife and I separated was the most devastating time in my life so far. One Christmas in my second year of University she told me it was over between us and we could not go any further. There was a lot of hurt for me that I had to go through. My wife and I separated and I was feeling devastated, depressed, and hurt.

Moving home helped me. I moved home to be with my family, to get rid of the hurt, and to phase it out of my life. I talked to my parents about it and to my brothers and friends to find out how to go about healing and how you handle something like that. Their support made me feel more confident about solving my problem.

I started getting involved with my Elders at home. I went to their meetings whenever they got together. I spent time with them and asked them questions about why things were done a certain way. Through not being idle and by spending time with them and in learning traditional ways, I began healing and feeling good about myself again. I started working the things out that needed to be worked out.

I was always able to speak our language. The time I was able to spend with the Elders (two and a half years), I learned that there is something else besides being fluent in a language and that is knowing how to use it. Even though it is the same language you can use it in so many different ways to achieve different ends. I guess the whole process helped me to become whole again inside.

I knew what it was like to be traditional, to get up at a traditional feast and be able to speak, and I think that was the healing process for me to get out and do what my Elders did. In a roundabout way they counseled me through my hurt by learning traditional ways.

The Elders told me that when I speak to them I am never wrong and that anything I have to say has some good to it. When I wrote speeches they told me that something was a good idea and this is how it could be improved. They showed me how I could add to my speeches. They would never say that this is what you forgot or that something was wrong. This really helped me to feel good

about myself and what I had done. By the end of the second year I was feeling good about myself. I spent enough time with them that I was no longer moping or feeling bad about the thing that happened to me in my life.

One of the things that the Elders did for me that helped me was that they taught me that my hurt was not the only hurt that anyone has ever gone through. A lot of people have gone through that hurt. Everyone has experienced a lot of hurt and you can't keep it within you and you can't just forget about it. You have to get it out.

I learned from the Elders that in everything that you do the Creator will be present. This helped me because it made me think about myself, because even though I was hurting I can go to the Creator to help me. They didn't just tell me to go to the church and straighten my life out there—that's not what they did. They taught me by example. As a result of spending time with them I was able to build up my spiritual self to a point where I was able to reach that superior being to help me with the healing process. They did this indirectly. They did it by example.

I received a general message from the Elders that I should go beyond myself to help others with their healing. In doing this I helped myself because I felt that I could do something useful and it helped me to not worry as much about my own problems.

Doing the community speeches helped me to put my problem into perspective. The breakup with my wife wasn't the end of the world. Life goes on. There were things that I was expected to do in the village. If I sat around and moped and worried about my problem and kept to myself, I would not be considered an asset to the community. I had to get out and face the music that my marriage was done with. I had to go on with my life. I was a valued member of that community and I had a role to serve and could not stay within myself.

Something that really helped in those two and a half years was that I never heard anyone say after a speech that I had made that I was wrong. That was a big sign to me. At the end their encouragement was getting stronger and they said that one day I would be wise. This was quite a compliment coming from Elders. I knew then I didn't have to worry about the breakup. This role gave me a new purpose and meaning and I didn't have to worry about the loss in my marriage.

Those two and a half years with the Elders helped to tie things in for me. Those 12 years of public school and many years of university were years gaining knowledge. Those two and a half years helped me to put this knowledge into proper perspective. At any one time and on any one day I can only spend 5-6 years in the classroom passing on knowledge as a public school teacher. The rest of the time I am also living a life that is meaningful to my community and to me. That is where the wisdom comes in by using that knowledge in proper perspective. That to me helped me more than anything I ever learned.

Something that helped with my healing was in learning that there is always someone there that cares. There are a lot of people who care and there is always someone who has the answer that you don't have and that you only need to reach out for that answer to get that healing.

Knowing that the Elders cared was healing. I worried about being socially accepted after the marriage breakup. At the wedding there are big speeches that

you have to do everything in your power to keep that marriage together. It's up to you and if you don't then you are a failure and that stuck out in my mind. I was afraid that I wouldn't be accepted after the breakup. I was accepted and they even started depending on me. They told me I could do the job so I must have been on the right track to be called upon.

Something that helped me was solitude. Out in the open ocean in my boat or drifting down the river or sitting on the bank I would find peace. This settles my heart down when I'm hurting a lot. Nothing is threatening me. I would sit there until I had to go home. There is a difference between solitude and loneliness. Loneliness is being alone. With solitude you are not alone. Animals wouldn't interfere with my life the way things would in the city—telephones ringing, cars going by.

Something that helped me was the noise of the water. Rivers slow me down. I can sit and go the same pace as the river and enjoy it and the sound. In the ocean it's the sound of the waves hitting the boat. Those noises are much more relaxing than the noises in the city. The water helped to calm me inside and it gave me strength.

Learning to open up my heart to nature helped. The Elders have a name for that which means heart opened up. When I opened up my heart to the beauty and peace of nature it made me feel good. Problems aren't that great that you can't solve them once you have reached that level where you can go with the flow of nature.

The Northern Lights helped me in my healing. In the city it's difficult, especially in winter. Up north in the winter times I would lie down on the living room floor. I had windows that were high so that I can lie down and watch the Northern Lights in the sky. This goes on for hours and is really soothing. It calmed me down and gave me strength.

Narrative Account #2

The hardest time was when I broke up with my wife. I had been drinking and doing drugs. My home life had collapsed. I tried to deal with problems on my own and it wasn't working. One night my wife and I decided our marriage was over and I should leave.

Going home was probably the thing that saved me. When we broke up I jumped into my truck and was planning on ramming it into something and killing myself. While I was driving I recalled that I used to go to my Mom and tell her what was wrong, so that's what I did. When I got there I couldn't say anything to her I just hugged her and she hugged me. I went outside and my sister seemed to know what was wrong and she hugged me and I cried for the first time. Just knowing that someone loved me made me feel that it was worth living. After that I was able to put the pieces back to together and start to look at alternatives. Mom didn't really understand why we were breaking up but just her being there and knowing that she cared for me and would look after me when I couldn't be alone helped a lot. This is what I needed because my self-esteem was so low and I just felt like a total failure. I had failed the kids and I had failed my wife. Knowing my family still loved me helped to pull me through that.

The thing that helped a lot was water. I would go to the river or to the lake or something. I would just sit by the river and watch the water flow. The water was continuously flowing whatever happened even if there was a snag or something it would just flow around it. If a rock was sticking out of the surface the water would flow around it. It made me feel that's how I should be and that I should carry on.

I used to go out to the trapline with my Dad, and he said that the Indian people would thank the water for letting them cross it safely by giving it an offering of tobacco. I also did this to help in my healing. When I sat by the water I would throw some tobacco in the water as a type of prayer. At this stage in my life I was very disappointed with organized religion. The Roman Catholic faith I had been brought up with didn't appeal to me. I didn't know much about Native spirituality. I had thought it was quaint and no longer applied to people but when my faith in the church was gone, my faith in nature was still there and putting the tobacco in the water helped me to realize this. I think in a way it strengthened my Native spirituality again.

When I went into the bush I was able to think about what I had done to bring this on. I didn't feel good about myself, but being outside and not having anyone to judge me made me realize that I wasn't all that bad. I had screwed up but I wasn't a total sinner or failure or other stuff I had thought about. Nature was forgiving and accepting. It made me feel that I was part of the whole thing and I had a right to be there. Knowing that I had the right to be there gave me the feeling that I was OK. I was part of it and it was OK to be me. This helped me to heal a lot.

Rocks helped me in my healing in different ways. Rocks that stick out of the water seem to be strong. They have a power. Sometimes a rock had a positive force so I would put it into my pocket and then later put it down somewhere calm. I wouldn't chuck it like I would some rocks. It would be like a sponge because it could absorb my prayers and I could leave it somewhere. I put all of my force in the rock and it was good energy. I was putting some of myself back into creation. Giving back something that I had received felt very healing.

With bad feelings the wind would help. It felt like the wind just blew them away. It just dissipated because it felt like creation was so big my problems would just disappear and be absorbed. It was like the whole of creation was absorbing my bad feelings. The wind could take away my problems only if I threw them into the wind. In my mind I had gathered problems and feelings up and threw them into the wind. If you don't throw them up into the wind it won't work.

At times I felt confusion and I didn't have a clue what I would do with my life. Once I was driving down the Liard Highway and I was really troubled. I felt like dying because there was nothing that I could do and I had no plans for my life. I parked the truck and decided to walk up this hill. On top of the hill there was a clear pond filled with clear water. It was a sunny day with blue skies and the water seemed as clear as glass. The aspen trees had turned yellow, a beautiful gold color. The water was so clear I could see a big rock at the bottom that was sort of drawing me to it. I thought about just jumping in the water and drowning. The water was drawing me into it. I could see that if I wanted to end my life it would be so easy. I stood there for 5-10 minutes just staring into the

water. Then I looked down on the ground and there was a big rock beside me. I picked up that rock and threw it into the water. That was what the water wanted. It wanted something added to it. That rock must have weighed about as much as I did because when I threw it in to the water it made a huge splash. At the same time that feeling of wanting to jump in there disappeared. It was like that water had got its wish and had something in it now. I walked away from there and got back in the truck and went home. As I drove home I realized that I had to do something about my problem with addictions first or I wouldn't go anywhere. Throwing the rock in there was like the turning of a page. It was like things just seemed to fall into place after that. The water wanted my energy or force but when I saw this rock beside me I realized that it had the same kind of force so I threw that rock in there and the water was happy. I didn't have to put my life into the water so now I could put my life's energy into something else. I could go on living.

I go to high spots to help with my healing. This past summer I worked for BC Parks. I had planned to bring my kids to be with me but I didn't know if I could do it. To calm my doubts I climbed this mountain and sat up there and prayed and things became clearer. I was able to see through some of the problems that I didn't think could be solved. Sitting up there thinking things through helped me to come up with a game plan. Being on the mountain and connecting spiritually helped me to see farther. When I can physically see farther it helps me to see farther within myself.

One of the things about going to a treatment center that helped a lot was that it stressed the AA program and going to meetings and talking about feelings. I never did talk about feelings before because I didn't think it was of any use and it wasn't manly or something. Talking about my feelings helps but it's still difficult to do.

The AA helped a lot. I can put it in my own interpretation. AA just makes suggestions but it is spiritually based. It has put me in touch with what I call the Creator. It reinforces the idea that God loves me no matter what I do. Because before I didn't feel that I was worth being loved.

Narrative Account # 3

A bad time was when I was 21 and all of my childhood problems and painful memories began affecting me. It affected my mental health and my view of life and how I should cope with it in a negative way. I was very depressed during this time and was seriously considering suicide.

My grandmother thought it would help me if I learned to look around and see how other people deal with their problems. I started to pay attention to things around me so from this I started seeing other people drinking and using drugs and being violent and dying from it. This made me more determined to do something about my own drinking problem and to deal with things differently.

I was having a hard time going to work because I was drinking a lot to avoid thinking. I was given the option of going to a treatment center or being fired. I went to Roundlake Treatment Center for First Nations people. It was there that I went to a Sweatlodge ceremony. It was explained to me that it was like going into the mother's womb again. I really benefited from this ceremony. I went in

thinking about being reborn again. I was given another opportunity to get a new start to life. In the sweat an image came to me it was of my dead grandfather. He told me to keep going with life and not towards death like many of our people were doing. That stuck with me and helped me to stay away from drugs and alcohol for 10 years straight. Seeing that image of my grandfather stuck with me.

I had this recurring dream of a bear and a wolf. In the bear dream the bear chases me up a tree. I had run half way down a hillside and it chased me up a tree. A curved tree like you see growing on a hillside with a curved trunk. As I run I can see the bear behind me even onto the tree where it was pushing on the trunk to try to knock me out of the tree. This happens again and again, that I kept dreaming about this bear, and then in one dream I just decided to drop out of the tree and face the bear. The bear just smelled me, that's all it did, and then it turned around and went back up that hill. I realized that this had to do with my fear. That bear was an image of fear to me and that there were a lot of things I was afraid of that I wasn't ready to confront yet but when I finally did it wasn't as hard as I thought it was going to be. This realization helped me to get past the fear and to start doing the things I needed to do to deal with my problems. I learned not to be afraid of transition.

I was looking for positive helping images in my life because my grandmother told me to look for them. In one dream I was running and running and running and I couldn't seem to stop running. Every time I looked over beside me there was a wolf running alongside me just keeping pace with me. It made me feel more confident to face my problems to know that the wolf was always beside me.

I used to take a walk in the bush where it was isolated. During the time that I was depressed I would walk along the power lines behind my village. One day I was sitting in a favorite spot there thinking about what I should do about pain that I am carrying around when just then a bear came crashing out of the bush, crossed the clearing, and went crashing back into the bush on the other side. When I walk through the bush it is really tangled and tough to walk through. Watching the bear encouraged me to go straight forward and not be afraid of sobriety. At that time everybody else was poking fun at me and saying that I must have thought I was better than them because I stopped drinking. Thinking and acting like that bear taught me that it was okay to take big steps. This helped me to feel a lot better about not using alcohol but in finding straighter paths to deal with my problem. My grandfather's guardian spirits were the wolf and the bear and I think that they are for me now too.

Other times going to the sweatlodge helped me with not drinking. Being encased in darkness with the heat and the sound of the drum made me feel like I was being held without really being held by anyone. It made me feel like being an infant again and seeing things like a child rather than someone who has been through a lot of horrible things. Coming out and cleaning in cold water was like rebirth. This is concrete and not really part of the thought process it gives me comfort and security. The experience of the sweat stays with me and comforts me.

When I was being ridiculed for being sober I had a regimented exercise routine. I would run hills and I would look at the hills as being problems. As I got to the hill I would think that this hill is a problem and I'm going to climb it bit by bit. When I got to the top I would often have a solution to the problem or at least a

better understanding of ways of dealing with it. It was always hard going up but going down was easy. I would usually go to small hills around my village but if I had big problems I would find a big hill which I could then run up, walk up or crawl up if it was really steep. I would build good energy doing the hills by exercising and taking the toxins out of my body. It helped me to look at problems that way. I used it as a metaphor because if I can climb hills I can face problems the same way. Climbing hills like facing those problems would make me stronger in mind, body, and spirit.

Exercise in general helps a lot because it teaches you about dealing with problems the right way. Exercise is hard and dealing with problems is hard. There are steps on how to do them but sometimes I would get caught up in doing them the wrong way and not get anything out of them. I had to learn to do exercise right and this taught me to deal with problems properly. Just exercising doesn't really help because I have to exercise with metaphors for getting over the problem. That's what really helped me. Once in my community there was this police officer who was giving me a hard time. I had received a weight set for Christmas. I was so angry at this cop I went down and I pushed weights for two hours. My anger was so powerful that I still felt angry even after those two hours. This didn't work because all that I was doing was just straight physical exercise.

Cold water helped me a lot either by swimming in a cold river or by using cold water at the end of a shower. It brings things to base existence and calms me. It's like it helps me face the cold hard facts. It would remind me that I was the only one who could make the decision not to drink. No one else is going to be able to stop me. Cold water grounds me and reminds me of my responsibility.

In my first year of sobriety in the late spring, I really wanted to go back to drinking again because everybody else was doing it. I was rocking the boat by not drinking. I talked to my Uncle who had been sober for seven years and he told me to go to this small river behind our village and pick a spot that I liked and sit there. He said to ask myself the question that I needed to find the answer to and then wait for the answer. I watched that river and saw how it runs and how it goes over rocks and around rocks. The water would behave differently all the time. As I sat there and heard the sound of the water it made things peaceful because it hushed the air. I thought about drinking. In looking at the river I saw that I could take a sip of the river or I could drink the whole river but it wouldn't matter because that water will keep flowing. I thought if you got all of our people lined up on the bank and if they tried to drink they wouldn't be able to because that river would keep on flowing. With alcohol one drink is too much and one million is not enough. This is what kept going through my mind. But if we lined up our people on either side of the river and had them drink the water and bathe in the water and fish in the water, that's a lot better. The question of going back to drinking again was answered when I thought of that river being all liquor. Trying to drink up the river wouldn't accomplish anything because the river is too powerful.

Water can fill any capacity. You can move water any way you want but it always goes to the bottom line. It looks for the easiest route down and that's right down to earth. That's what it has done for me. It's brought me back to the earth again. I

want to be like water and be connected with the earth because it gives me strength and helps me to lead a good life.

When I first moved to Vancouver and was attending the Native Education Center I lived down in the skids in a hotel room in the East side. One night before Christmas the loneliness really hit. I had been in my room and it was around 11 o'clock and I had been crying. I remembered the wolf and how it goes out and howls until its mate answers or its family group answers. I went down to the waterfront late at night and I did exactly that—I screamed and hollered and cried my eyeballs out until I let people know back home that I really missed them. This felt good to do this. The next day I got a letter from back home and I thought that the Creator is right. I just have to go out and express myself like the wolf. It may have been a coincidence but I saw it as a sign. Going out and screaming was good. If I did it in public it would have created tension for people. Wolves howl when they are lonely, so its all right to be sad and lonely and let people know, so the wolf really helped me.

Mountains have helped me. One time I was really anxious remembering the sexual abuse I had experienced as a kid. I was at my Dad's house and feeling sad and I looked out the window at this snowcapped mountain. It was beautiful and it was solid and it had been there a long time. At different times of the year it looks different, sometimes it is mostly snow and other times it is mostly green. That helped me that day to think about that mountain that was put there by the Creator. Sometimes we are given a huge problem to deal with for a reason. Without seeing that mountain I don't think I would have survived that day. I wanted to be like that mountain. The mountain will always be there, it doesn't go anywhere but it changes how it looks. It has strength and beauty. The problem I have with those memories will always be there but some days it will look a lot better than other days. I am learning to be like that mountain.

Narrative Account # 4

My problem was deciding what I should do—whether to continue living with my husband or to leave him and to go to school. This was very hard on me and I was very stressed because my husband wasn't there and my family wasn't there for me. I had no one to lean on and I felt overwhelmed. I didn't have any skills of my own to support myself or my kids.

Talking to people helped, especially talking to my sister. I told her what I would like to do and I got reassurance from her that it was possible to survive this. She would question me about my relationship. We talked about coping skills and she showed me how she was coping. That's what I was looking for. Because she worked in the band office she knew the routes to go for help. She was also a model for me. The ways that she coped made her a role model for me to follow. My sister knew me and knew strengths in me that I didn't see and she told me these things. I felt better about myself and my abilities to face this problem.

My aunts and uncle provided me with guidance in different ways. They let me talk about my emotions, which was good. They also gave me directions as to what I should do with the kids. That was helpful and reassuring to me. The most important thing that they did for me was to give their permission and approval for me to leave my husband and to go to school. I felt I had to get this permission

for my sake, my husband's sake and the kids' sake. This really relieved anxiety for me. They also went and spoke to my husband about this. This was helpful to me because I felt relief that he knew that they knew why we split up.

I asked my aunt and uncle for stories about things that happened in the past that would relate to my life situation and would help me to reduce the stresses. They gave me examples of other persons' lives—parts of legends. The example of another person's life made me aware that this wasn't an original problem. It had happened before and had been dealt with before. This released the stress of thinking that I was the only one struggling. It also gave me confidence that I could make it through. This lifted my depression. It was not as heavy as it was before.

Something that helped was taking a walk and looking at nature. My sister and aunts looked after the kids and this gave me time to get out into nature. When I looked at nature it released me from thinking about what was bothering me. It released me from everyday life and showed me that there is also life out there. Life goes on and it never stops, it doesn't all stop just because you do. If I left my husband life would continue and it doesn't really matter how we think about it life goes on.

Walking in the woods helped me to get out of myself. Getting out of myself made me realize that things happen on their own. Things don't happen all together. I was getting all of my problems and putting them all together and trying to deal with them that way. The result was that I couldn't think of how to do anything because it was all mixed up. By getting outside of myself I was able to look at them differently and separately. I was then able to feel better about moving ahead and dealing with them.

In nature it doesn't matter what you do or what you say, because no one will judge you. I could holler, cry, or whatever I wanted. This was really good, because it helped me to get my emotions out and that relieved stress.

The biggest attraction in nature is water. I grew up near water, so any time I hear water in any way it attracts me. When I get close to a river or a stream it affects me spiritually because it is a cleansing element. You can wash physically, spiritually, mentally, or emotionally. Listening to water would release me emotionally by letting me cry or laugh or let out whatever emotion needed to be expressed. I remember walking by water and feeling release by crying. I feel better afterwards.

I always used my grandmother as a model in coping with problems, because I felt that she was strong and she was independent, and I used her as a role model. If she could do it, then I would do it too.

I went to resources in the community who were leaders. The school administrator encouraged me to get an education because in bettering my education I could better my children's education. He went to University too, and he was also a role model for me. He had information about programs and funding. He also told me what to expect. Talking to him was very helpful because he gave me information and motivation that made it easier to go to University.

After my separation one of the things I did that helped in my healing was to get involved in extracurricular activities like ceramics and ballroom dancing. They

helped me to get out of my shell and to build self-confidence. I'm still not a good dancer, but I went for three years because it helped me to feel more in control and confident in myself. These activities helped me to feel OK to be myself in a social situation and that helped me in my healing.

The Peer Support training I took helped because it showed me how far I had come and what I had been through. Helping others helps me to know that I have learned a lot. I didn't know how to ask for help before. The Peer program showed me that I can do it now. I still hesitate, but I can do it.

Examination of the Narratives

An examination of the four narratives provides information that adds detail to what is known about the facilitation of healing for First Nations people. First, the 14 categories previously presented are seen in action as methods of healing used and described by the participants. It is also possible to see a logic or division in the healing process when the process is examined from beginning to end. Last, an examination of themes that emerge in the narratives provides new insights that further describe what facilitates healing for the participants.

Division of the Healing Categories

There is a division and logic to the healing process of the four narratives. In the beginning of the healing process, most participants described themselves as withdrawn, self-confined, disconnected, out of balance, angry, hurt, and sad. By the end of the healing process, participants described themselves as feeling connected, accepted, balanced, and generally positive. A study of the stories of the participants reveals four divisions of categories in the healing process. These four divisions can be described as: separating from the unhealthy life; obtaining social support and resources; experiencing a healthy life; and living a healthy life. This organization of categories is by no means exhaustive, nor is it intended to represent a strict chronological sequence. As demonstrated by the narratives, it is not necessary for someone to progress through these divisions in the order presented.

Separating from the unhealthy life. In this division an individual first identifies the problem and expresses his or her emotions. The individual learns to determine, clarify, and make sense of the problem by talking with others about it or through observing other people or even something in nature that helped them to understand the problem. He or she expresses emotion by various means such as talking, crying, singing, or screaming. He or she also feels a need to keep parts of himself or herself in balance. At this stage understanding the problem is separate from the expression of emotion about it. The former is the cognitive aspect of the self, whereas the latter is the emotional part of the person. An example of the division of separating from the unhealthy life can be seen in the first two narratives when, after recognizing that they were in need of healing, the two participants each returned home where they were able to talk about their

problem, understand it, and express their emotions. Being able to separate from the unhealthy life is an important first step in the healing process for all four participants.

Obtaining social support and resources. In this division the individual seeks help or support from others and establishes social connections with others. This support takes the form of encouragement, motivation, acceptance, validation, and reassurance. The individual feels socially connected when he or she is able to get beyond his or her own world through social interaction. This transition can be seen in the accounts of all four participants who sought out friends, family, and community members for help and support as well as the need to "get beyond themselves."

Experiencing a healthy life. In this division the individual is able to live a fuller life doing many or all of the following: participating in ceremony, learning from a role model, establishing a spiritual connection, establishing a connection with nature, and anchoring oneself in tradition. Participation in ceremonies such as the Sweatlodge ceremony helps individuals to feel grounded and connected to a healthier life. Role models provide guidance and instruction about healthier ways to live their lives. Finding some spiritual connection gives individuals an additional sense of balance. Often Nature offers calmness, strength, and guidance. The feeling of integration with one's culture provides a strong sense of direction and belonging. For example, the first participant experienced a healthier life through knowledge of traditional ways. The second participant experienced a healthier life through reconnecting with his spirituality. The third participant experienced a healthier life through participation in a Sweatlodge ceremony and from the helping images he derived from it. The fourth participant experienced a healthier life through observing role models who showed her how to live.

Living a healthy life. In this final division the individual moves on to goal setting and becomes involved in challenging activities, exercise, engaging in self-care, and helping others. He or she also takes steps to ensure that he or she is able to live and maintain the new life experienced in the previous stage. Many feel optimistic and empowered by this new involvement in challenging activities and in a new sense of discipline. Exercise ensures that one feels a stronger physical being. This overall self-care affirms self-worth and reinforces respect for self as well as for others. Helping others provides individuals with an opportunity to reach out to the larger community and to feel empowered in doing so. There are several examples of how the participant started living a healthy life. The first interviewee started living a healthy life by "going beyond himself and helping others." The second participant challenged himself by learning to express his emotions to other people. The third participant established a regular exercise regime where he was able to balance the physical aspect of him-

self and acquire discipline. The fourth participant continued to challenge herself through extracurricular activities and goal-setting.

Examination of the Healing Themes

An examination of themes that emerge from the narratives provides new information that further describes what facilitates healing for the participants. The first observation or theme derived from the four narratives is that there is a broad spectrum of healing resources available to First Nations people. For example, in the category of Nature, participants obtained healing from animals, rocks, water, mountains, the wind, the earth, and the sky. In the category of ceremonies, the Sweatlodge ceremony alone can provide participants with cleansing, catharsis, spiritual connection and empowerment. This multitude of healing resources contrasts with the limited mental health approaches provided to First Nations people by the majority culture. Relative to the variety of approaches that are used by First Nations people, Western mental health approaches are apt to be viewed as restrictive in what they have to offer for healing.

A second observation derived from an examination of the narratives is that First Nations people have a different way of seeing the world. As is described in the background of this article, a different set of cultural beliefs or world view has implications for the provision of healing services. For example, the ability to see nature as being capable of speaking to you about your problem and providing direction and guidance in healing is a view that would be foreign to most Western mental health practitioners. Participants range from believing that they were literally in contact with the spirit of a rock to a more general belief that nature provides them with healing images, symbols, and metaphors. There is a commonly accepted belief among First Nations people that the natural world contains the blueprint for how we should live our lives. Such differences reinforce the belief that healing practices are culturally bound.

A third observation or theme is that the participants seem to expect that whatever is healing should help to put them in balance. This is a concept inherent in the Medicine Wheel. The First Nations Medicine Wheel teaches that the separate entities of the self—mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual—are equal and part of a larger whole. It is necessary to keep all four parts of the self in balance in order to become healthy and remain healthy. It is therefore expected that any therapy or healing approach should ultimately address all four areas of the person. If an approach does not accomplish this the client might well feel incomplete. When people with this cultural expectation encounter Western therapies, a conflict emerges. Because most Western therapies tend to focus on a single dimension of the person, such as the case with affective therapies such as Rogerian therapy, the First Nations client often leaves feeling that only one part of the self has been attended to.

A fourth observation is that self-transcendence followed by connectedness seems to be a desired route by which participants gained the necessary insight into the nature of their problems and the direction for how to live their lives. Participants were often urged by Elders and family to "get out of their self" so that they might find the peace, understanding, strength, and guidance necessary to find and follow the path to a healthy life. In transcending the self, the participants would then connect with healing resources such as family, nature, community, and spirituality. When participants state that "It made me feel that I was part of the whole thing" and "I was part of it" they are referring to this phenomenon. To feel connected it is necessary to become part of something such as nature, the spiritual world, the family, the community, the culture. This is not possible if the individual does not first go beyond his or her own self. If the person is self-absorbed and confined within the self, then he or she will not find healing. This view of self-transcendence contrasts with western mental health approaches that often stresses the need to strengthen the self or the ego so that the individual can master their environment.

A final observation is that throughout these incidents we can observe that the participant acts as an agent of his or her own healing. They are not acting as a patient or victim but as an agent on their own behalf. It is also significant that other people treat them as their own agents. This is exemplified by statements made to participants such as "I received a general message from the Elders that I should go beyond myself and help others with their healing. In doing this I helped myself."

In summary, through examining the accounts of healing as told by four participants, it was possible to develop general categories or divisions that encompass the specific categories. The discussion of five themes that emerged from the narratives also provides new information about the features that facilitate healing for First Nations people. As well, this discussion serves to sharpen several differences in healing approaches used by First Nations people and Western mental health practitioners.