

# The constant itch to self development:

A personal journey with Atopic Dermatitis

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# **The constant itch to self development:**

## **a personal journey with atopic dermatitis**

### ***Abstract***

This project Demonstrating excellence "The constant itch to self development: a personal journey with atopic dermatitis, is a multi-method autobiography that shows how the psychological pattern behind my chronic skin symptom emerges in dreams relationships and different areas of my life.

This longitudinal in depth study of my own case is based on the paradigm of Process Work which has a basic belief that disturbances such as body symptoms contain their own solution and potential healing.

With four interviews, several described and transcribed therapy sessions, dreams and descriptions of inner works, journal entries as well as creative writing and an exercise I show how I use my symptoms as part of my personal growth.

Social and cultural attitudes influence the way we deal with our experiences. My body symptoms and their underlying energies are a constant driving force in shedding old skin of my identity and its internalized societal expectations.

# 1. Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

## ***1.1 Introduction***

This dissertation is a personal story and an illustration and long-term study of my personal experiences in living with chronic Atopic Dermatitis. My skin symptom weaves itself through my process like a red thread and is my constant focus and patterns relationships, my inner life and development as well as my activities in the world. It is part of my life myth.

I use Process-oriented Psychology as my basic belief system and theoretical framework of understanding body symptoms. Therefore the assumption is prevalent in this work that my symptoms are meaningful, contain their own solution and are an important ally on the path of personal growth.

In the first part of this dissertation I will introduce basic Process Work ideas; I will specifically address the connection of chronic body symptoms with mythical life patterns and describe how these long-term patterns are outlined in childhood dreams and memories.

The second part is presented in the form of interviews I conducted with my mother, my brother and my two long-term ex-partners. The purpose of these interviews is to show how my body symptoms and particularly my skin problems have influenced my personal relationships as well as my inner relationship to myself.

The third part is dedicated to my latest personal development. I use information from transcribed therapy sessions, journal entries, descriptions of my innerwork as well as creative writing examples to show how I have dealt with the symptoms and patterns over the last year and months on an emotional, intellectual, social and creative level. Since I am my own object of study engaged in this ongoing process of discovery, the very act of describing and expressing myself becomes part of the study. In writing this dissertation, I often use a very personal, intimate and non-linear style.

This work is a personal and creative search for healing which I see as an unconventional creative process that wants to be lived. I mean unconventional relative to the Swiss culture that I grew up in.

The search for healing has brought me to many different doctors and healers and eventually to therapy - first to a Jungian and then a Process-oriented therapist. The latter was a turning point for me. The Process Work paradigm was able to answer some of my questions about my tantalizing skin syndrome. Working with the actual experience of my symptom, discovering it and unraveling its mystery helped me value my underlying process of excitement and ecstasy.

My cultural background as well as the culture of my family had a big influence on the development of my personality, the way I relate to myself and to others and to my body

symptoms. I grew up in Switzerland, in a strong Calvinistic and Puritan belief system that values hard work and not much fun. The idea is that acceptance of one's fate and hard work will be gratified in heaven. This strict and rigid attitude creates social values which mirror in people's behavior: The expression of feelings or strong emotions in relationship or in public, for example, is highly discouraged. The belief that one has to accept one's fate unquestionably does not invite change but rather inhibits it. To make radical changes of any kind - be it individual or political - goes against Swiss culture. It is generally not supported.

Switzerland is a small country in the center of Europe. In order to establish and to keep its own identity, it has a long tradition of fighting for independence. William Tell, Switzerland's mythical hero, stands at the beginning. He was the freedom fighter who resisted the Habsburgian people who were about to include the Helvetians into their powerful kingdom in the late 1200s. The fight for independence lives on in the Swiss people to this day. You meet this spirit, for instance, in the common attitude that being able to do everything by yourself is preferable over having to ask other people for help. Individual success is more encouraged than looking to join others and create teams in order to achieve success. I remember this from my school days where we rarely worked in teams, did not create talking circles but rather worked quietly by ourselves. The spirit of "I don't need anybody and can do it all by myself" furthers individuality and makes it hard to share things with others or accept help from others; it creates feelings of loneliness and isolation rather than a sense of togetherness and community.

This strong sense of independence is well mirrored in aspects of Swiss foreign policy. The emphasis on political neutrality says: "We choose to not get involved in other people's business." Switzerland has so far resisted joining the European Community for fear of having to go along with others and losing its identity. What looks like respect and acceptance for other peoples' way of dealing with their problems on their terms, has turned into a stubborn way of holding on to the old ways, the myth of a little safe raft within the raging sea of conflicting peoples and nations. Staying neutral takes on the flavor of the uninvolved and superior bystander who contributes to keeping the status quo and does not engage in the creation of sustainable peace for everyone.

The ruggedness and wild beauty of the Swiss mountains is also reflected in the psychology of Swiss people. Under the rigid and rough outside of the societal attitudes often lurk deep and wild feelings and emotions. I like the wild and rugged parts of that mountain spirit in my individual psychology too, yet feel imprisoned by the social rigidity of my family's and Swiss mainstream culture. My body symptoms have been a constant push in my individual development towards wholeness; my body has somatized the need to break out and free myself from my specific cultural and familial background.

I am not the first one in my family's history to struggle with physical symptoms: lung problems, skin ailments and allergic dispositions. It feels to me, though, as if I inherited everyone's share.

My mother told me that my paternal grandmother suffered from eczema, something I haven't known until recently. My mother also mentioned that Nana (my grandmother) felt guilty about it. I don't have more specific details about her health; it makes me think that she hid her symptoms well. Most likely she suffered from the same taboo that I was going to have to deal with for most of my life.

I remember my grandmother as a very proper and Puritan woman who surely did not live the fiery and passionate side of herself much. She was very responsible and kept the family together. My grandfather, however, had a much easier time following his impulses and letting spontaneous plans lead his life. He was a man who was very much connected with nature. He loved attending to his bees, went fishing and hunting, collected berries and mushrooms, and would disappear into nature for days at a time.

I understand that my maternal great-grandfather had asthma; unfortunately, I do not know anything more about him. He died when my mother was still a child. Her father has an allergic disposition, as well as my mother herself. My grandfather is allergic to mosquito bites which give him incredible hives.

My mother has some strange allergies that come and go. I remember that she had a really strong skin allergy one summer from working in the garden where she touched a mallow after it had rained. The contact with the wet plant in combination with the sun brought out an incredible rash that spread all over her legs and arms.

My father had a rare lung disease that debilitated him for many years. He eventually died from complications with pneumonia when I was 17 years old. When I look at my family history I see some fiery spirits who were only partially allowed to live and were contained most of the time.

I not only inherited my physiological constitution, I was also given a certain temperament and experienced a specific environment that was crucial to overall development.

My father's rigidity and the patriarchal values for which he stood have greatly influenced me in my life; I mostly experienced them as painful and inhibiting. His love for Roman languages and ancient art showed me his more sensitive and creative side and gave me a framework of what was interesting and valuable to him. Being a sensitive child, I quickly noticed what was appropriate behavior around him and which parts of myself were unwanted and inappropriate and needed to be repressed. He felt uncomfortable around the expression of strong emotions and did not approve of a wild and boisterous child.

My father's pedantic nature terrorized everybody in my family. My mother suffered a great deal from it. She didn't show much strength relative to him and rarely stood up to him or followed her own ways, which was the expected behavior for a woman in Switzerland at the time. For me, she modeled and reinforced a pattern of going along with fate and not taking things in my own hands. She did not "mother" my independent and adventurous spirit until much later when she started to believe in me. This improved our relationship considerably.

Before I go further into my experiences in living with a chronic skin disease, I will describe my skin condition, Atopic Dermatitis, from the perspective of Western medicine.

Atopic Dermatitis (AD) is a chronic inflammatory dermatitis that usually starts in early childhood. It is also called Neurodermatitis because of the vasomotor instability of the sufferer. It appears together with asthma and hay fever and is also called eczema-asthma-hay fever complex. One of the most characteristic symptoms is the intense itching. There seems to be a hereditary aspect to it, as usually one or more family members suffer from asthma, allergies or dermatitis. The course of AD is totally unpredictable.

People with AD tend to have a dry skin that flakes and cracks open which makes the person prone to little infections. The level of the immune globulins IgE is constantly heightened and the eosinophils, which release histamine in an allergic reaction, are high in numbers in the blood stream. This hypersensitivity of the immune system causes constant stress on the person's body.

Living with a skin symptom that is very visible has made me painfully aware of the impact of societal norms and judgments on my general well-being. Beauty and appearance, the look of young and unblemished skin seem very important in Western society. I have never been able to fit these norms; it has stirred up feelings of self-hatred and shame in me and impaired my self-esteem at times.

Having a body symptom that changes the way I look and is very visible to anyone, makes me feel exposed to all kinds of assumptions people might make about me. It creates nervousness, embarrassment and awkwardness in myself but also in people I meet. My skin symptoms make me very vulnerable and afraid of inviting criticism. I am very aware of the social stigma and expect it everywhere. Such a visible ailment impacts relationship contacts, social and professional aspects of my life. I realize that some public jobs would not be available to me because of the required conventional appearance.

My paranoia increased when people asked me whether my skin disease was contagious or not. It hurt me deeply and made me even more shy about physical contact. I have heard some horrendous stories from people with strong skin diseases who were teased and sometimes treated like outcasts. Some of them totally withdrew from society as a result of feeling marginalized by mainstream society.

Some of these issues I share with people who feel excluded from and marginalized by mainstream society because of other physical disabilities. Most skin diseases, with the exception of malignant skin cancer, are not terminal. They carry a lot of stigma, yet their effect on the person's life is minimized and the pain and suffering not understood and reduced to "just a cosmetic flaw."

The social stigma adds to the suffering of the physical experience. My skin symptom is by no means only a visible disturbance. The physically tantalizing itching symptom is what makes it almost unbearable. I would like to convey how it is to live inside a skin

that is constantly irritated, tickling and burning, stretched and tight, and hurts practically day and night. I want to rip off the skin of social stigma, break out of the cultural taboo, expose myself and free the spirit that lives inside of me.

A lot of pain is stored inside of me. I have pushed this pain down into some dark areas of my psyche where things are not verbal anymore; feelings of vague numbness reside in those places. In order to cope with my fate, I have suppressed the feelings of pain and misery. It took me years to get to a place where feeling and experiencing all the suffering is no longer devastating, but rather healing. Working on this dissertation drove me through many storms of all kinds of emotions. I am very glad to have been able to open up to some of those hidden spots and release the trapped emotions.

## Chapter 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***2. 1. Holistic approaches to skin disease***

This section is a search through the literature of different healing methods, some of which have proved useful to me for my own experience, some of which have caused some positive and negative reactions in me.

This chapter is divided into the following sections:

2.1.1 A literature search for personal experiences with skin disease

2.1.2 A brief history of concepts and treatments of skin disease in early literature

2.1.3 Skin disease as described in "Western Medicine"

2.1.4 Skin disease as seen in psychosomatic medicine

2.1.5 Skin disease in alternative medicine

#### **2.1.1 A literature search for personal experiences with skin disease**

I have been searching forever for a book that would mirror my personal experience of living with AD, feeling very alone with my experience. Finally in 1991, browsing through a bookstore, I found a book about Neurodermatitis written by a AD sufferer and her partner. What a relief to see a lot of my experiences mirrored in a book!

Neurodermitis is not a simple skin phenomena but a "multi- factored happening" as K & M. Jung (1991) say in their book. The title, Die aufgekratzte Seele. Neurodermitis, translated "the irritated, scratched and wounded soul" captures a lot of the experience of living with AD.

Katharina Jung, who is an AD sufferer, and her partner Mathias Jung give a touching and honest picture of their experience of living with the illness. They address the relationship difficulties and sensitivities, the various quests for help, the consolation and their paths with the suffering. The book is a synopsis of personal reports, journal entries and poems by AD sufferers, interviews with psychotherapists and medical doctors and personal stories of parents; it offers help and support for the hopeless AD sufferer.

Different contributors see the isolation of many AD victims as a crucial problem. Some encourage the AD victim to fight the conventional medical system; some see a need to form support groups in order to get people out of their painful isolation.

Jung herself addresses how difficult it is for some people to see their physical symptoms connected to a psychological pattern. She sees how societal and internal judgments about psychotherapy inhibit people from getting the help they need. She says that whoever talks about the difficulty with their skin has already jumped out of the loneliness of suffering.

The French poet Paul Valerie talks about skin exhibiting profundity of a human being.

Dr. Christina Detig-Kohler, diploma psychologist, refers in her interview to the relationship aspect of AD. She states that it is very common for people who suffer from skin disorders to wish for closeness while at the same time being afraid of it. According to her, this is the underlying dynamic of the relationship problems. She observed that AD sufferers have a similar fear of separation in relationship as they have of a close commitment. She talks about the difficulty of being vulnerable in relationship and of relating to one's inner life.

These problems mirror my experience. I recognize myself in those experiences and have seen some of these traits in other people with skin diseases.

A similar collection of different articles, interviews, essays as well as a whole section about practical help with dietary plans, skin care tips and addresses of AD associations is presented in Neurodermitis (1992) written by Elisabeth Schlieper, an AD sufferer and Giesela Vogt, a dietitian.

I have been wondering about the scarcity of personal recollections of living with chronic skin diseases - in fact I have not found one at all published in English and only the two mentioned above.

I know how difficult it is to have a visible mark. It might be that people with skin diseases have their mark written on their skin already and so badly want to hide it that actual mentioning it amplifies the pain that is behind it.

The social attitudes about beauty and skin care as well as some of the psychosomatic literature with its pathologizing attitudes support negative images and attitudes in sufferers towards themselves and therefore must make it difficult to talk about the arising problems.

In my personal experience it has taken a lot of courage to start talking about my pain and suffering about having such a visible ailment.

I was happy to find the following personal story of a path through chronic disease.

Kat Duff (1993) describes in her book Alchemy of Illness the process of living with Chronic Fatigue syndrome (CFIDS). She talks about how her struggles and fears initiated her into new realms of awareness and understanding life.

Chronic disease and chronic suffering is something that evokes a lot of fear in people and is disavowed in our western attitudes towards health and illness. Western medical model gives the idea that health and the body can be controlled and fixed at any time. But when it comes to chronic long-term illness, this model often reaches its limits, and sick people feel like failures.

Kate Duff's personal style and the way she connects her experience and the experience of illness in general to psychology, religion, mythology and other disciplines have made my own experience valuable and has inspired me.

Once again, I wonder why there is no book about living with a skin disease. So many times I have searched in libraries and bookstores. I find personal stories on living with all kinds of chronic illness, but none that specifically addresses skin disorders. In the medical section of most bookstores I find, under the section on skin, cosmetic books with titles like "How to maintain a youthful skin," and "The new guide to a vibrant skin." This dissertation fills an important gap in offering a personal account, a medical autobiography of living with Atopic Dermatitis.

Renata Ackermann (1994) shows in Stories of our lives how she helps people with life threatening illness bring their experiences across and get in contact with irrational non-linearly connected fantasies that have potential meaning for the person and their illness. The irrational connections and fantasies people make about their illness and the onset of it can connect the person with their dreaming process and raise their awareness.

Through interviewing people and hearing their stories of their experiences with the disease process she helps them in breaking the silence and painful isolation that sick people often experience.

I have experienced with myself and with other sick people how crucial it is to be able talk about the fear, pain and loneliness of being sick.

Investigating potential meaning in symptoms has proven a big help for me.

### **2.1.2 A brief history of concepts and treatments of skin disease in early literature**

The History of Dermatology (Thomas, 1933) states that in the Ebers Papyrus a variety of diseases are described and there is a special interest in skin diseases and cosmetics. A large part of the Papyrus is dedicated to dermatological problems. The remedies include a wide range of plants and oils such as dill, beer, yeast, milk, poppy seed, sulfur, honey, onions and sea salt - just to pick out a few.

In Greek mythology, Apollo was the physician of the Olympus. His son Aesculapius became the patron of medicine; he taught medicine and his followers, the Asklepiads, were the first physicians. Hippocrates was one of them.

A lot of the people who came to be cured in the Asklepeion in Epidaurus had skin diseases. After Hippocrates' death volumes of studies on skin and dermatology were found. The remedies of the Greek physicians did not vary much from the Aegyptians except for the emphasis on hygiene, baths and massage.

Peter Elsener (1994) describes the different kinds of eczemas and informs the reader about diets, climatherapy in Europe practical tips and gives addresses for skin support groups and Skin Associations and medical insurances in his handy book: Diagnose Ekzem.

### **2.1.3 Skin disease as described in "Western Medicine"**

According to Fitzpatrick (et.al.) (1987) in Dermatology in general medicine atopic dermatitis (AD) is known by various names such as atopic eczema, allergic eczema, neurodermatitis.

The term "atopy" had the meaning of "out of place" or "strange" and means that there is a tendency to develop allergies to food and inhalant substances as manifested by eczema and hay fever on a hereditary basis.

AD has three stages: The infantile eczema occurs between two months and two years; The childhood eczema occurs from two to ten years and after that the eczema goes into the adolescent and adult stage.

The atopic person has a constitution with unusual immunologic marks and is prone to certain infections.

Vikkerstaff & Bielory (1990) explain the function of the immune system and its connections to allergies in Understanding Allergy, Sensitivity & Immunity. The heightened IgE level in the blood of people with AD and the increased number of eosinophils in the bloodstream indicate a hypersensitivity of the immune system. In an allergic reaction, the number of eosinophils rises incredibly and in connection with the IgE in the blood, histamines are released into the body tissue which then causes allergic symptoms such as hayfever, itching, inflammation of the skin, hiving and asthma.

There are some typical marks that people with AD share. They are: a much higher level of IgE serum in the blood, a parallel wrinkle under the eye and increased markings in the palms as well as the white dermographism in AD. This means that if one pulls a line with a finger or the back of a pen on the skin of a person with AD, the line on the skin will show up white as opposed to red in other people.

The symptoms of itching are emphasized in AD. It is not always predictable if the itching causes the scratching or vice versa.

The allergic constitution of the AD sufferer makes it hard to test allergens. The mere scratching of the skin for the allergy test can cause an inflammation of the skin that makes it difficult to recognize what the person is really allergic to. Each of the allergic substances or the combination of them can cause a reaction that is unpredictable - it might be an asthma, a skin or a hay fever reaction.

In Signs and Symptoms (1983) by MacBride, I found a chapter about itching (pruritus) by Harley A. Haynes and Sylvia Christine Johnson.

The complicated and biochemical process of itching in the body has been widely researched and is still not fully understood.

In chronic dermatoses the nerve endings can be damaged which creates itching in itself. It has been found in research of nerve fibre regeneration that there are two types of itch - the more primitive, poorly localized prostatic itch, which regenerates itself in a damaged nerve ending quickly but persists after stimulation has stopped - and the epicritic type, which is more localized and stops after stimulation.

In AD the prostatic itch is often present because of the damage of the nerve endings.

Neurological research has shown how pain and itch which are conducted on the same nerves can be experienced in interchangeable ways. It has been found that morphine at the same time relieves pain and increases itching. Heating the skin to or above 40 degree Celsius relieves the itch but increases the feeling of burning pain. This article also says that the threshold to the itching is lowered during stress, at night and in inflamed skin.

#### **2.1.4 Skin disease as seen in psychosomatic medicine**

A study of the University of Michigan Medical School in Ann Arbor (Gupta, Gupta, Schork. & Ellis) (1994) on the correlation of depression and pruritus (itching) has found that there is a connection between itching and depression. Through the depression and the effect on the immune system the itching is increased.

It was difficult for me emotionally to read some of the psychosomatic literature because of the causal and pathological attitudes that it conveys for me.

According to Obermayer (1955) in Psychocutaneous Medicine studies have shown that people with AD have a labile personality with repressed anger, guilt and resentment. They have a tendency to be rigid and stubborn and reject their mother.

I was especially appalled by the bold letter print on page 210: **The patient with neurodermitis is an abnormal individual.**

Similar to this idea Alexander (1985) says in Psychosomatische Medizin that patients with skin disorders and specially with AD have certain general traits of being neurotic, narcissistic and exhibitionistic and show sadomasochistic traits in the vicious circle of itching and scratching trying to attract love and compassion from others and then feeling guilt ridden for having done that.

Reading psychosomatic medicine is partly interesting to me and partly depresses me and certainly did that in the past. I used to only be able to read a small section because I started to feel so inappropriate as a person. I used to have reactions of anger, frustration and get depressed by the kind of judgmental attitudes - which would just prove to the psychosomatic doctor that I have an angry and repressed personality which is one of the traits described.

Ashley Montague (1971), in Touching, writes about the importance of touch for the development of humans and other animals. Touch is influential in the development of the immune system and other organ systems of the body. Montague shows in a number of research examples how absence or disturbances of skin contact negatively affect the growth and development of humans and animals.

Montague emphasizes the importance of the skin and says that skin and the nervous system arise out of the same embryonic layer - the ectoderm. Therefore one could say that the skin is the external part of the nervous system.(p. 5)

Organs and hormonal development, as well as growth, are shown to be developed and improved by skin stimulation in animals and human beings. Montague underlines the importance of touch and physical contact for development in the later years.

It has been found that even parasites who create irritating skin stimulations have their importance for certain animals.

A. Gunner (1971) observed that hedgehogs might need fleas to stimulate the skin circulation. An Australian animal: echidna is seen to not survive long if de-fleaded. Many animals like crocodiles, hippopotami and elephants have parasites living on them. The probability is that these parasites stimulate their otherwise thick and inaccessible skin and therefore the nervous system and the whole organism with the brain.(p.37)

Dr. Maurice Rosenthal (1971) connects eczematous skin disorders in humans with inadequate cutaneous contact from the mother or caretaker. (p.272)

Dr. Spitz though raises the question:

"We might ask ourselves whether this cutaneous reaction represents an adaptive effort or alternatively , a defense" (p.272).

The child could want the physical contact of the mother and indicate this by scratching. It feels a rejection from the mother and scratches to make a distance to the mother and withdraw. I think it might be either.

The influence of the skin and skin contact on the immune system has been researched. It was found that the epidermis produces a substance very similar to thymopoietin, a hormone of the thymus gland which produces T-cell differentiation. T-cells are an important part of the immune system.

Research with monkeys has shown that the leukocyte count in the immune system gets suppressed by being separated from their mothers and from tactile stimulation.

I found the research in this book interesting and fascinating. It supported my experience of how the health or disease of the skin has an influence on the person as a whole and affects the physical, emotional and psychological realm.

Stephen Locke and Douglas Colligan (1986) present the idea that psychoneuro immunology and the influences of emotions and attitudes as well as outer influences have a impact on the immune system in The Healer within.

Ted Grossbart, a diploma psychologist of Harvard researched skin diseases and used hypnosis and relaxation methods to support the immune system.

He describes his methods also in Mind Body Medicine (1993) in a chapter on skin diseases entitled "Skin: Matters of the Flesh".

With various methods he tries to change the persons' physiological conditions and understand the meaning of the symptoms by finding out which sensations make the skin feel better. He then uses that experience to recreate the persons' healing environment in their mind. One person might imagine walking through a cool mountain stream, whereas another one will imagine sitting by the fire or lying in the sun on the beach. (p.184)

I thought it was interesting that for some people it was healing to use the actual sensation of the symptom - the heat - while for others it was the opposite sensation - the cooling that was helpful and healing.

Maguire's (1993) Hauterkrankungen als Botschaften der Seele (The fire and the serpent - a Treatise of Psychosomatic Dermatology) (1991) describes connections between various skin conditions and psychological patterns. Ann Maguire is a Jungian psychologist and dermatologist.

She uses symbolism and mythological material to illustrate and analyze the cases of people with various dermatological diseases.

She sees the fire and the serpent as special recurring symbols in peoples' fantasies and dreams as well as descriptions of their skin experiences.

Eczema - she says - derives from a Greek term that means "to cook" (p.73).

This term makes me think of the alchemical aspect of being cooked in the skin. It certainly feels like being cooked in one's skin to have an attack of eczema.

Maguire relates Atopic dermatitis or neurodermatitis to a problematic relationship with the mother in early childhood such as ambivalent feelings of the mother towards the child.

She says that the mother's unconscious fears and unresolved problems with her own mother are getting transferred to the child. By expressing the ambivalent feelings towards the child the neurosis will disappear.

### **2.1.5 Skin disease in alternative medicine**

Reading in Jeanne Achterberg's (1985) book about Imagery I realize, once more, how much this method is part of my own way of dealing with my symptoms in daily life. I often look at my skin when it breaks out and imagine it as a landscape into which I then dream.

Jeanne Achterberg shows in her work on Imagery in Healing, Shamanism and modern medicine that imagery plays an important role in medicine - in the process of various forms of healing.

She defines imagery in the following way:

Imagery is the thought process that invokes and uses the senses: vision, audition, smell, taste, the senses of movement, position and touch. It is the communication mechanism between perception, emotion and bodily change.

Achterberg shows in various ways how the immune system is influenced by imagery, symbols and positive conditioning.

In the chapter on shamanism Achterberg describes a case of a shamanic initiation where the shaman to be had been stricken with small pox and survived. He took an imagery journey to hell and lost all his limbs and eventually got them reassembled again and could subsequently perform shamanism for his tribe.

Depak Chopra connects western medicine and research with aruyvedic medicine as well as modern physics in Quantum Healing.

Chopra defines quantum healing in the following way:

Quantum healing is the ability of one mode of consciousness (the mind) to spontaneously connect another mode of consciousness (the body).

He says that the deeper cause of disease is to perceive the mind and the body as being separate from each other.

Thoughts, memories and emotions create different chemical patterns in the brain and the same chemicals can then be found in different organs all through the body. The neuropeptides are connecting our whole being and therefore this "body-mind" is transcended with intelligence.

Ancient doctors of India have always looked at the body as being created from consciousness.

Chopra emphasizes that the attitudes we have to our own healing or that the doctor has to our prognosis is crucial since thoughts trigger chemical reactions within the system and negative or positive attitudes can influence the healing process of the patient. The term "nocebo" stands for a negative effect that a doctor's negative opinion about a patient's healing process can have.

In a study of four hundred people with terminal illnesses it has been found that everybody who had a spontaneous remission of cancer had changed their attitudes towards their illness in a positive way just prior to the remission.

This shift of attitude says Chopra can happen through contact with the underlying intelligence - the quantum reality - that interconnects all being.

"Maya is the illusion of boundaries, the creation of a mind that has lost the cosmic perspective."

According to Grossinger (1982) spiritual healers such as African doctors conceive the spiritual and physical world as a unity that cannot be divided. The physical matter is simply spirit manifested in the body. (p. 97).

This field concept is found in Taoism, modern physics and Process Work. Through the disease or symptom the totality of a field or a personality is manifesting itself, it becomes whole or "healed".

Traditional Chinese medicine proposes that the body is an integral whole in which everything is interrelated by organs systems and meridian systems.

Chinese medicine is based upon the Taoistic concept of the universe as an everchanging dynamic - the effortless flowing interchange of the two polarities, Yin and Yang. Chinese medicine collects all kinds of information from the patient in order to see a pattern of "disharmony" which indicates the treatment the Chinese doctor will prescribe to get the patterns of disharmony into a harmonious balance again.

Kaptchuk (1883) says that Chinese medicine is not interested in the cause and effect of body symptoms but rather in the relationship of different physical phenomena that are happening at the same time. (p. 4,19)

Kaptchuk differentiates between Eastern and Western medicine and says that the two have a very different view on disease. Western medicine is analytical. It looks for the underlying mechanism of the symptom. It tries to find a specific cause for the symptom and if found will try to eliminate this causal malfunctioning. Where the western doctor zooms in to find the single cause of a disease the eastern doctor looks for the relationships between the symptoms. An Eastern doctor is interested in the interrelations of symptoms. She tries to find underlying patterns and configurations of disharmonies. Chinese medicine is holistic in that it looks at the persons' whole being.

...no single part can be understood except in its relation to the whole (p.7).

Chinese medicine sees the relationship of the symptom to the whole body. The Chinese doctor searches for a pattern of disharmony in the patient and tries to balance out the system.

Different from the western concept, the cause and effect are not as relevant as the relationship between the different body parts and systems. The symptoms are seen in relation to the person as a whole, including all aspects of life such as food habits, sleep patterns, relationships and life style in general.

The Yin and Yang theory in Chinese medicine is based on Taoistic thought which has a dialectic that sees each part as related to the whole. Yin and Yang are fluid polarities in the flow of constant change, containing each other's opposites. There is no absolute Yin or absolute Yang but there is a fluid movement between them.

Although each part contains the other as well - the outer parts of the body as hair and skin are considered more Yang and the inner organs more Yin, the upper body more Yang and the lower part more Yin. The organs are separated into Yin and Yang organs. The heart, lungs spleen, liver and kidneys are Yin, the small - and large intestine, the stomach, gall bladder, the bladder and the triple burner are Yang organs.

Each Yin organ is connected to a Yang organ. The heart with the small intestine, the lungs with the large intestine, the spleen with the stomach, the liver with the gall bladder the kidneys and the bladder and the pericardium with the triple burner which are both not organically fixed systems.

The five fundamental substances are: Qi, Blood, Jing, Shen, and the fluids. According to Kapchuk, Qi can be thought as "matter on the verge of becoming energy or energy at the point of materializing."(p.35)

The five phase system was documented for the first time by Zou yen in the times between 350-270 B.C.E. The five phases are: wood (spring), fire (summer), earth (Indian summer), metal (fall), and water (winter). The five phases are processes, not states.

From a conversation with Eric Stephens, who is an acupuncturist, I learned the following:

Skin belongs to the metal element in the five phase system and is closely related to the lungs. The two organ systems that relate to the metal element are the lungs and the large intestines. The lungs govern the Qi that is connected with skin and hair. They regulate the sweat glands, moisturizing the skin and body hair. The nose being the outer opening of the lungs and the large intestine is the opening to the anus. Those are the areas that tend to get inflamed a lot. The air passages, the sinuses, skin and mucous membranes are indicators of the condition of the lungs.

Emotionally, the metal element is associated with grief and sadness. A lot of attachments to principles, relationships, objects or whatever and not enough emotional release are often related to this kind of condition. If you can't let go you get a lot of heat inflammations building up in the skin or the colon from holding things in. The letting go is the real teaching of the metal element.

The metal element has to do a lot with boundaries. If the boundaries aren't respected they get inflamed. This is seen often with inflammation type eczemas.

In Chinese medicine the chronic type eczemas have to do with a deep heat in the blood - the body moisturizing fluid. By creating a lot of heat the blood gets dried out - deficient.

Homeopathy is conceptually holistic. It includes all aspects of a person. A homeopathic doctor needs to know numerous different details of a person and her life. The homeopathic doctor who treated me questioned me in depth for two full hours on the first consultation about food preferences, digestion, life style, dreams, hobbies, exercise, relationships. He explained to me that he would use high potencies of remedies with me since my condition was such a chronic one. In general the potencies of medications that are used according to the acuteness or chronic persistence of the symptoms. Acute symptoms require lower potencies - chronic diseases higher ones. Highly potentiated remedies are highly diluted and shaken hundreds and thousands of times until there are no more chemical traces to be found. Only the vibrations of the essence are contained in the dilutions, which are mostly purified alcohol or lactose sugar.

Homeopathy understands disease as a sick body that is not in harmony and therefore struggles and reacts with symptoms in order to get back to balance and harmony. As Richard Grossinger (1982) writes:

In homeopathic cybernetics, the organism is presumed always to have the best possible (i.e. least destructive to itself) response to an underlying disturbance. It may develop painful and exotic pathologies, but even they will be the best it can do under the circumstances. Its response is actually as system-wide recognition of existence of disease within itself and a synchronous attempt to allow the disease (which is contemporary and inevitable) to express and vent itself with the least damage to the vital organs (p. 170).

Trevor Smith (1987) writes about homeopathy:

Symptoms are the diagnostic bricks of homeopathic practice and the essentially healthy dynamic response to internal imbalance by the patient (p. 29).

In homeopathy symptoms are the most important indicator for a homeopath to find out what remedy is needed to cure the patient. The medication is an element that, used in an undiluted form, creates a similar symptomatic reaction in a healthy person as the one the patient is complaining about. The remedy creates the symptom but not the disease itself. The homeopath calls this remedy "similar." The cure with "similars" often brings forth the symptom in an amplified manner before the constitution of the patient is strengthened and heals itself. (Smith, 1987).

I had homeopathic treatments years ago and had very strong reactions to those highly potentiated subtle medications.

What should have been initial aggravation as it is described in homeopathy turned out like a severe break out of all my symptoms over a long period of time and was more like an initiation - a kind of falling apart of my former life for me. The homeopathic treatment amplified my physical and emotional process and made it emerge in such a strong way that I could not repress it in any way any more. Although I suffered incredibly during that time in terms of homeopathy - and other paradigms other than the western medical one - this treatment was a success.

My search for literature and methods in a variety of healing modes has brought me to the realization that eventually there is an inner shift of attitude - a spiritual shift of detachment that needs to happen in order to heal.

Chopra (1989) shows in his book Quantum Healing how dipping into the underlying network of "intelligence" brings spontaneous remissions and healing.

In my experience this shift develops over time and maybe it is only in the deepest moments of despair that one can finally detach enough from one's identity and reconnect with the spiritual and mythical part of oneself.

In the next chapter I will talk about the mythological aspects of skin and skin disease I found in myths, fairy tales, and legends.

## **2.2 Skin and Transformation in Mythology**

### **2.2.1 Transformation**

In my search of literature I focus on the aspect of transformation as I found it in alchemy and archetypal initiation patterns. Then I will focus on the role of skin in mythology fairy tales and symbolism in different cultures.

Joseph Campbell (1988) says in a conversation with Bill Moyers:

Campbell: People say that what we are all seeking is meaning of life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive so that our life experiences on a purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's all finally about, and that's what these clues help us to find within ourselves.

Bill Moyers: Myths are clues?

Campbell: Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life (p. 5).

I am excited about Campbell's idea: "Do not just search for the meaning in a myth, but find the myth in your own life and live it!" By inviting unconscious material into our lives, we grow and expand our awareness and strive towards wholeness. In his books *Myths to live by* (1993) and *The Power of Myth* (1988) Campbell explains that myths are archetypal patterns that are repeated in our daily lives; we are constantly creating the myths of our times.

Reading Jung's *Psychologie und Alchemie* (1972) deeply immersed me with the philosophy of alchemy and the ideas of the ancient alchemists. Jung researched the old mystical and alchemical scriptures and made a connection between alchemy and the psychological individuation process. He found that symbolism, mythology and the ancient sciences such as astrology and alchemy have certain universal, or, as he calls them, archetypal aspects, which are mirrored in people's dreams independent of their culture.

Alchemy was part of all the world's ancient cultures and their philosophies. This ancient philosophy and pre-science seeks refinement of the soul by transformation of various substances. The Western alchemists experimented with various materials (*prima materia*) and tried to transform the substances by heating and cooking them in the alchemical vessel.

Jung describes the four or five stages through which the alchemical process goes. The four stages are: *Nigredo*, *albedo*, (*lubedo* which got lost later), *rubedo* and *conjunctio*, which is the stage of the conjunction of the opposites, the wholeness. This wholeness is often pictured as the melting together of such polarities as sun and moon, silver and gold, mercury and sulfur, the male and the female. This process of transformation to the self is also pictured in the mandala symbol which has a fourfold pattern (1973).

The Western alchemists experimented in their laboratories with physical matter they wanted to transform into gold. The real goals, however, were spiritual transformation and mystical experiences. By projecting their own soul activities into the transformation of the material they saw their spiritual process of transformation.

J.C. Cooper (1990) shows the differences of Western and Eastern alchemy in Chinese Alchemy. Alchemy was found in China, India, Babylon, Chaleda and Egypt from where the hermetic traditions travelled to Greece. From there they later spread to Europe. In Western culture the alchemists often had to disguise their spiritual quests; they experimented in laboratories in order not to be prosecuted. Chinese alchemists were in search of the Tao; they had more freedom within their culture to believe in esoteric values and pursue a spiritual path.

Chinese alchemy differentiates between exoteric or laboratory alchemy and esoteric or philosophical alchemy. The exoteric branch dealt with the "Elixir" and immortality, whereas esoteric alchemy dealt with spiritual transformation of one's own body and soul into the "True Man." Transforming material was quantitative, the inner alchemy was spiritual and qualitative. The exoteric work of the laboratory experiments were symbolic for the inner transformations.

The goal of the Chinese alchemists was to find the Elixir of immortality and prescriptions of prolonging life in general. Chinese Alchemists used practices such as meditation, breathing exercises, philosophical thought and certain medicinal herbs. The quest for immortality in Chinese alchemy went through different stages of which the lowest one was to attain death without a corpse.

To become a "hsien" or a genie - pure spirit that is one with the Tao - is to become immortal and transform beyond the worldly material level. Life-long spiritual practices would finally create a new subtle body with supernatural powers; the hsien can fly with the wind, can be in more than one place at once and can be visible or invisible at will.

Campbell describes the journey of transformation in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1973) as a path of the hero who goes through different stages: Departure, initiation and return. The hero is challenged by obstacles, has to descend into dark places, for instance, such as the belly of the whale, before he returns to the normal world again.

Mircea Eliade explains in *Man and Transformation* (1980) how initiations give us a glimpse of death. Initiation is the equivalent to spiritual maturation. The child that goes through an initiation ritual matures to adulthood; she or he has to withstand fear, torture and suffering during the initiation. The person who is getting initiated dies to his or her old identity in order to grow into a new one (p.8).

Fear, chaos and pain are part of initiations which give us a glimpse of the other world. Initiations rituals of native people often take place in the forest or in dark places such as caves. In native tribes dismemberment, scarring of the skin and piercing of the different

body parts are often used to mark death and heroism. These signs are significant of death and resurrection. "For all traditional societies, suffering has a ritual value: the torture is held to be administered by superhuman beings, its aim being the spiritual transmutation of the victim" (Eliade, 1980, p.17).

Medicine man Grizzlibear Lake says in his book *Native Healer* (1993) that torture, dismemberment and intense suffering are often callings to become shamans and healers. He was considered dead several times in his life, as a calling and testing of the spirit to become a native healer.

### **2.2.2 Skin in mythology, fairy tales and folk tales**

The Germanic myth of the Nibelungen is a tale that has been told and retold so many times that many different versions exist. Keim's version (1972) tells the story of how the young hero Siegfried slays the dragon Fanfir with his sword (gram). Some of the dragon's blood accidentally touches his finger and he notices that his skin is getting very thick. Siegfried then bathes himself in the dragon's blood and obtains a thick, horny skin that protects him in many fights to come. Except for one little spot between his shoulder blades where a maple leaf stuck to his skin while he bathed in the dragon's blood - his skin becomes tough like a shell and he is impenetrable. No one knows about the little spot of unprotected skin except his wife who betrays him and whose lover kills him. Biedermann (1994) refers to this version of the "horned Siegfried" too (p.308).

According to the *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (1989) Sigurd slew the dragon Fanfir (the transformed Alberich), then touched his blood and started to understand animal language - an act of transformation which Jung connects in the following way:

Siegfried eats Fanfer's heart, the seat of life. He wins the magic cap through whose power Alberich had changed himself into a serpent - an allusion to the motif of rejuvenation by casting the skin." (1990, p.364)

The mythological symbol of the snake shedding its skin represents eternal change and life. Joseph Campbell (1988) reminds us:

The power of life causes the snake to shed it's skin to be born again, just as the moon sheds it's shadow. The serpent sheds it's skin to be born again, as the moon sheds it's shadow to be born again. Life sheds one generation after another, to be born again. The serpent represents immortal energy and consciousness engaged in the field of time, constantly throwing off death and being born again (p. 45).

In ancient beliefs all over the world the snake or serpent was the animal that didn't die from old age but would periodically shed its skin and then emerge reborn and renewed

into another life. The Greeks called the cast skin of a snake "geras" - old age. In Melanesian the slough of the serpent has the meaning of eternal life (Walker, 1983).

Medieval Hermetists worshipped the ouroboros, the magic snake, who is a symbol for eternity, cyclical events and developments and the alchemical synthesis.

Skin is a symbol of rejuvenation and eternal life in many cultures. Von Franz (1978) talks about animal skins as "... evidence of an unredeemed nature" (p. 118). If animal skins, as symbols of "ugly or unacceptable unconscious material" get burned or washed off too soon, positive aspects contained within cannot be realized. She further states that "Indeed, most neurotic symptoms are like troll-skins and cloak important positive contents of the unconscious (p.119).

In the fairy tale of Sealskin that Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992) recounts, a fisherman falls in love with a mermaid, hides her sealskin and asks her to marry him. She agrees and says that after seven years it will be decided whether she will stay human or go back to being a seal. He agrees. They have a son. After seven years her skin starts to get all dry and wrinkly, she loses her natural plumpness and starts to shrivel up. Her skin starts to flake and peel. Her eyes get bad. She reminds her husband about the seven year deal. He gets upset and doesn't want to give her sealskin back. He is afraid that she would leave him, which she finally does with the help of her son who subsequently becomes a shaman and visits her periodically. The fairy tale's theme is about the woman who needs to get her own skin back in the form of a new intuitive and powerful identity.

Von Franz (1978) describes this theme as well, when the anima appears in an animal skin - as a fish mermaid or bird - and becomes a human being. Often the woman gets humiliated, disappears and goes on a long quest to find her identity again.

In many fairy tales wearing an animal skins relates to an aspect of transformation where the person is turned into a scary, ugly animal or monster by a spell and is later liberated by love. The following fairy tales are examples: "The Beauty and the Beast", "Bearskin", the bear in "Snow White and Rose Red."

J.C. Cooper (1978) understands the wearing of an animal skin as a way to take on the power of the animal; it puts the person in touch with the animals' instinctive knowledge (p.153). In the Ainu tribe of Japan the bear is a holy animal; they eat the meat and then preserve its skin which is hung up in the houses to protect material possessions.

The berserkers were Nordic warriors who would dress in bear skins and fight in a frenzied state; they were considered only partly human (Biedermann, 1994). In Greek mythology, whenever a ram was sacrificed, the pilgrims would sleep on the skin of the sacrificed animal and wait for a dream.

Another common motif uses animal or human skin for disguise. Sara Halprin (1995) discusses in detail the tale of "Allerleirauh" where the beautiful daughter of a king escapes her father's incestuous ideas of marrying her after his wife's death. She escapes in a coat of a thousand furs and lives as a maid in a neighborly kingdom. She is an independent young woman who is developing her inner self by living like an orphan and

poor child in order to escape the male expectations of her role as an adapted and conventional woman.

Similar to this one is the Italian fairy tale of "The old woman's hide" where a young girl runs away with her wet-nurse because her father punished her. Men are after her too much, and they decide for the young girl to disguise her in a skin that they take off an old woman who has just died that day. The disguised girl has a good spirit, and the young prince takes her to his court as a maid. She is very talented, and eventually the prince finds out that she is a young girl and marries her. The theme of sexism is apparent in this fairy tale. The young girl had to hide her beauty because the men are making life difficult and dangerous for her.

Halprin tells the african fairy tale of Mulha, a young pretty girl who's beauty the ogress Imbula took as disguise to enter the village. Mulha in return had to wear a ugly red pelt. As she bathed in the river the pelt slid off and the disguise was discovered. The ogress who looked like the beautiful young girl was found and killed. As Halprin states, Mulha's temporary transformation was an initiation into finding deeper values than outer appearance. She discovered that wearing a ugly red pelt gave her new powers and privileges within her tribe (p.160-164).

Makkock (1965) tells a legend of a young prince who got infected with leprosy in West Country Folk Tales. A prince gets leprosy, and his family sends him away. He finds work in another kingdom as a swine herder. One day he sees that one of his pigs is infected with leprosy, and soon all of them are infected. He goes further away from the villages. One evening he notices that the pigs keep rolling themselves in a certain muddy spot. Then they bathe themselves in the river, and their scabs disappear. He takes off his clothes and rolls in that particular mud spot, too. After a few times, his skin gets healed. Under the mud spot the famous healing wells of the city of Bath were discovered, and the prince returns home to his kingdom.

His initiation is a severe illness that has social stigma and isolates him form society. It inhibits his worldly powers and his possibility of becoming a ruler like his father. The prince has to leave the father principle in order to get to nature. His healing starts as he becomes more earthy like the pigs who are very intuitive animals. In various cultures pigs symbolize passion, lustiness, untamed nature and fertility.

Italo Calvino (1956) tells an Italian folk tale of a young fisher boy who gets to fish for the king and falls in love with the king's daughter. The king disapproves and sends him off to sea with the hope that he'll never return. The boy Piduzzo is caught by Turkish pirates who take him to the sultan. The sultan suffers from an incurable itch and orders for the best doctors. Piduzzo, thanks to a magic book that the princess gave him before he left, knows of a special ointment that will cure every possible disease. He applies it to the sultan's body for three days and the sultan's skin sheds like that of a snake and he ends up cured. Loaded with gold and silver Piduzzo returns home and marries the princess.

Piduzzo is the hero who has to travel and follow female magic and the unpredictable in order to become a healer to the sultan. The ruler is healed by shedding his skin, by transforming and renewing himself. The itch often represents the spontaneous intuitive awareness process (Mindell 1985).

In his book *The Golden Bough* (1950) Frazer talks about skin diseases and their causes from the viewpoint of different cultures. Some cultures believe eating the sacred or totem animal causes pocks, leprosy and boils in people. In Egypt the pig is sacred and drinking its milk is the cause of skin diseases. The Bantu people in Africa also believe that killing and eating sacred animals causes skin eruptions. One of their healing methods is to rub ox's fat and herbs on the skin. The bush people in Surinam think that eating wild pig (capai) causes leprosy. In Celebes and New Guinea people believe to be descendants from different wild animals: Pigs, serpents, crocodiles, turtles, dogs and eels. To eat the animal from which they derive causes leprosy and madness. The Omaha Indians of North America have the elk as a totem animal. To eat elk causes the skin to break out in boils and white spots. Maize is a totem of the Omaha Indians, too; eating it causes sores around the mouth. In Syria eating fish is believed to be the cause of ulcers and stomach bloating.

Surely there are some medical explanations for the skin diseases caused by spoiling meats and fish in certain climates as well as hygienic circumstances but it seems that native cultures and tribes associate skin disease with not being in contact with their spirit and nature.

In mythology and fairy tales skin appears as a symbol for the constant process of change, eternal life and transformation.

Process Work, which I will introduce in the next chapter has a basic Taoist belief that everything in life is part of an ongoing process of change.

## **2.3 Process Work**

### **2.3.1. Introduction**

Arnold Mindell developed Process Oriented-Psychology (also known as Process Work) over the last 25 years. Mindell came as a young physicist to Zurich, Switzerland in the sixties to study modern physics at the Zurich University. He got in touch with a Jungian analyst, one of C.G. Jung's students. He started to study at the Jung Institute and to follow his dream about combining psychology and physics.

Mindell, a creative and daring spirit, soon started to develop and teach his own ideas at the institute. In 1983 Mindell and some of his colleagues and students founded the Research Society of Process-Oriented Psychology. Process Work has its roots in mythology, Taoism, alchemy, Jungian psychology and modern physics.

Process Work focuses on whatever is "in process," and ever changing. There is a basic belief that whatever is happening contains meaning which can be useful when unfolded and understood. The process is the flow and ever changing continuation of life. The idea of state and process are contradictory, yet both can be useful in Process-Oriented Psychology. A momentary state can give us an indication of the process. The state is like a frozen picture of a film that is rolling.

Experiences can be looked at from the view of primary and secondary process. The primary process relates to the experiences we identify with; it addresses all our intentional behavior and action. The secondary process describes information that happens to us, anything that disturbs us, all that is the "not me." It is the part of us that we do not identify with, like body symptoms, involuntary movements, disturbing noises, dreams, relationship problems, synchronicities.

Process Work's underlying philosophy assumes that there is an implicit drive in nature towards wholeness: unintentional or secondary material wants to be noticed and lived. The secondary process expresses itself in different modes or channels. Similar to a radio that has different channels through which it receives information, we receive information from the secondary process through different channels. Dreams, visions and hallucinations are sent through the visual channel; inner voices, music or noises through audition; body symptoms through proprioception (body feeling); involuntary movements, tics and twitches through kinesthesia (movement); gossip, relationship problems through the relationship channel (composed of the above channels) and when we are troubled by the environment and world events or we experience synchronicities, the information is coming through the world channel (composed of all of the above channels).

Mindell (1982, 1985, 1989, 1993) created the term "Dreambody" when he discovered that all of our body symptoms are mirrored in our dreams and vice versa. Mindell writes: "The dreambody stands for the total, multi-channelled personality. It expresses itself in any one or all of the possible channels." (1985, p.39)

In working with people Process Work uses a phenomenological approach. The actual experience and the specific sensory-grounded information of the client is very important

to the therapist. The exact way someone is experiencing a problem gives an indication of how to unfold the process. Mindell (1985) discovered through close observation of people's bodily reactions that the body tries to amplify its own experiences. As he watched people with a headache shake their head, people with eczema scratch their skin and his son break off a scab on his knee, he realized that the body's natural reaction to disturbances is to amplify them.

By amplifying a person's experience of a symptom the process can be unfolded in different channels. For example, if a person experiences pain as a pressure, the pressure can be amplified by pressing more on the particular place until the person experiences a sudden channel change and sees an internal picture that contains the same information. Mindell writes: "The basic idea of amplification is to discover the channel in which a dream or body process is trying to manifest itself, and to amplify according to the channel." (1985, p.9)

Amplification of a disturbance increases awareness, helps the process emerge and enables the person to step into the flow of experience. As long as I speak about an experience, I am not fully in it. The idea of amplifying the experience of the very things that bother us is radical to the western attitude which mostly wants to get rid of disturbances. Alchemists used amplification centuries ago when they increased the fire under the pot of the prima materia in order to transform it into gold.

Jan Dworkin says in her thesis on alchemy and Process Work:

"Process Workers like Alchemists want to create gold. They want to amplify the conflicting tendencies in the prima materia in order to discover purpose and significance in all the parts and find a way to bring the contrasting tendencies into relationship with each other, in such a way that the client's situation is no longer painful and meaningless." (1984, p. 21)

To really feel a pain or an itch, to enter and "cook" the experience until it transforms into something new, is finding the gold. The experience of the flow of the process in itself is the gold. As Mindell writes:

Out of context, dreams are fragmented stories, pictures that you can no longer quite remember from ongoing experiences. They are like momentary and incomplete snapshots of a river, so to speak. Shamanic experiences, however, come mainly from the streaming river itself. The term "process" in "processwork" refers to the shamanistic act of journeying directly with the river. (1993, p.20)

To get into the flow of things and therefore experience the dreamingbody means going into "the unknown," experiencing life's mystery and unexpected richness. Mindell writes:

Most of the time you focus only on those body sensations that go along with your daily program. You repress everything else. You stay close to home and avoid the uncanny, natural environment, fearing it as if it were a wilderness area. You think the body is ill when it becomes troublesome, and you fail to

realize that it is trying to dream, to communicate messages and create movements beyond your expectations. (1993, p.21)

Mindell takes a radical approach to body symptoms and other unwanted material that we experience as "not belonging to us." Instead of trying

to get rid of the disturbance or the symptom, he challenges us to go right into the river of experience, swim in it and enjoy the richness that nature is offering us. Every disturbance is a signal of potential growth in our journey to awareness and wholeness.

### **2.3.2 Body symptoms and Process Work**

Process Work does not make a differentiation between health and soma. It sees the body as an entity that is trying to dream and express itself through the channel of physical experience (proprioception). Therefore, illness and body symptoms are the dreambody expressing itself.

Process Work attempts to follow the process in a neutral, respectful and non-judgmental way, in order to discover nature's deeper meaning of disturbances such as illness. Process-Oriented body work aims to detect and unfold the energy behind the symptom and make it useful for the person's personal development. How a person phenomenologically experiences a symptom is real and meaningful. By entering an experience consciously a transformation can happen that reveals the deeper meaning of the symptom.

As I worked on my itchy skin in a therapy session, I experienced my skin as hot. Through amplification of, and concentration on, the experience I suddenly saw fire and then moved in the way I saw the fire moving. By entering into this experience, a transformation could happen that was meaningful and genuine to me.

Mindell says: "A chronic disease is often a life long problem, a part of someone's individuation process. I don't believe that a person actually creates disease, but that his soul is expressing an important message to him through the disease." (1985, p.13) Body symptoms are messages of the body, or, information manifesting itself through the body.

Max Schupbach (1990) emphasizes in his lecture on body symptoms, the radical impact of getting in contact with one's energy and altered states behind body symptoms.

To get in contact with such an energy or altered state makes an impact on a person's awareness and catalyzes change. If your body symptom contains strength but your everyday experience of yourself is weakness, it is revolutionary to access your strength. Even if you dare not yet identify with feeling all of that strength that experience will stay in your memory and one day you might grow into it.

In an interview, Dr. Max Schupbach (1992) said: "Disease is like a telephone ringing. Process Work tries to help people pick up the receiver and find out who is calling and what they have to say and then process what the symptom has to say." If the information is not heard because the person does not want to pick up the phone, it will keep ringing. The information will try to reach the person in other ways or keep persisting as a chronic symptom. The stronger the symptoms, the more urgent the message. Some body symptoms challenge or even threaten our identity in a radical way and demand that we change our lives. Symptoms happen at the edge of our identity. They challenge us to

expand the boundaries of our identity, to let go of our attachment to a fixed identity and to free ourselves from limitations. They push us to live according to who we really are.

In the recent past, I have witnessed some of my friends die. I have learned from them that to truly live one's own spirit is living as if one has already died. I often yearn for that state of complete liberation and try to live in the way my spirit wants me to be free. This is not an easy task for me. I can be my free wild self some of the time, but cultural and societal expectations strongly pressure me to conform and to keep the established boundaries.

Societal and cultural norms, as well as relationships and our everyday life are often not supportive of us living the messages of our symptoms because that would mean a challenge to their identities as well. I saw many people work on their disease processes in Process Work symptom clinics and learned how much negative societal attitudes and prejudices such as racism, homophobia, sexism, influence people's symptoms and sufferings. It is painful to see the restrictive effects of such collective attitudes on a person's development and search for freedom.

Many physical processes, such as cancer and AIDS, contain a message not only for the individual, but the individual often carries a process for the larger society. The person will feel drawn to become a social activist and freedom fighter or public speaker. In my personal experience I have had to deal with the social stigma associated with a skin disease. My symptoms have probably been mild compared to what some people with skin diseases have had to endure. I have greatly suffered at times from the societal attitudes around beauty, the cosmetic industry's promotion of a "healthy looking skin" and various ways to hide skin expressions that do not fit this conventional idea. The skin is one of the most expressive organs of our bodies, visible to everyone. Behind skin symptoms there is often a wild and creative spirit that wants to be expressed and needs to be seen in the world. I appreciate Sara Halprin's work (1995) which examines this beauty myth and puts many women's obsession with their appearance into a broader cultural and societal context.

### **2.3.3 Long-term chronic symptoms**

Long-term chronic symptoms are life-long challenges connected to mythical and spiritual aspects of a person's life. The spirit that resides within such a person needs to be freed and lived, yet the challenge to the person's identity is often huge so that it takes a long time to embrace and live its message. Max Schupbach says: "If a person is interested only in healing the body, he or she will look for a medical doctor and take drugs, unless the process is so strong that there is an underlying feeling that something bigger has to be healed." (Seminar on body symptoms, 1994)

Working on chronic symptoms over long periods of time is working on your personal myth. It will bring forth the various aspects of the mythical pattern. Using the image of the crystal again, the light might catch the reflection of a certain part more at one time than at another. The facets of the crystal contain racial, cultural, societal, national and regional as well as gender colorations. Every aspect of the person's process needs to be considered within the context of those specific tints in order to really see and understand the person for his or her true nature. For example, my White, Eurocentric, middle class,

Protestant, Swiss upbringing of a woman born in the 1950s strongly influence the way I deal with my skin's symptoms.

Awareness of chronic symptoms often diminishes over time; they have become parts of our primary identity; one has learned to live with them and accepts their existence as part of normal everyday life. My chronic skin symptom, for example, partially determines my life style. I avoid certain situations in order to not have to deal with them all the time. I don't go swimming in a chlorinated swimming pool in order to not aggravate my allergies. I wear vinyl gloves when I wash dishes or cut vegetables to which I am allergic. A person who wears prescription eyeglasses rarely thinks about their visual handicap anymore and doesn't have to wonder what might be behind the nearsightedness. The process connected to being nearsighted is still there and could be accessed, yet, since it is not a life-threatening situation, the person might let the opportunity slide and never know what personal power could be unveiled.

Chronic symptoms are like alchemical opuses; they require the spirit of an alchemist who is willing to immerse herself, possibly for her whole life, into the prima materia. She is willing to cook, even if the material will never transform itself, and she won't find the gold. Anyone who has ever dealt with a long-term difficult situation, like a chronic body problem, learns that the ability to love nature and its process is crucial for any transformation to take place.

### **2.3.4 Childhood dreams and life myths**

C.G. Jung discovered that dreams from childhood and early childhood memories contain patterns that manifest in various aspects of a person's life. Those early dreams are like a map of the person's individuation process. As children we are closer to the spirit world and therefore pick up the mythical aspect of our whole lives.

Mindell discovered a close connection between childhood dreams and chronic body symptoms. He writes:

In working with childhood dreams, I've discovered that they point to a life pattern of the dreambody behavior. Very often chronic illnesses appear in the childhood dreams. These major dreams pattern our lives, our problems with the world, and our body problems. (1985, p.67)

Alan Strachan (1992) has studied a case of a woman working on her chronic body symptom and her childhood dream by comparing the process structure and finding them identical.

He shows how the dreambody expresses itself by sending information through different channels.

Process Work looks at life as a holistic experience. The dreaming body is a holographic expression of a person's process where the same information is received in different channels. An early childhood dream is therefore a map with all the various parts of it accessible in a holographic way. I see the parts of a person's life process reflected in the

childhood dream the way different facets of a crystal shine through one another. The light might catch one facet more at one moment, emphasize another at a later point.

Max Schupbach used the image of a process mobile during a seminar on body symptoms (1994). The mobile turns in the air and makes different parts of it visible at different times while all parts are present and accessible at all times. By moving or working on one part of the mobile the others are worked on as well.

Childhood dreams one remembers as an adult often contain scary or weird figures and phenomena. These are dreams that were nightmares at the time, happened repeatedly, and left us with a strong memory. The spirits represented by these scary figures and strange phenomena accompany us through life and ask to be brought out and freed. They live inside of us and guide the underlying experiences of our particular problems. As life goes on, their energy is reflected in our dreams, relationship conflicts, body symptoms, movement processes and struggles we have in the world.

Since our primary process, our everyday consciousness and identity we have created for ourselves, often marginalizes these background voices, they become more and more threatening to our identity. The more we only side with the known parts of our identity, the more we discriminate and oppress other, less accessible parts of ourselves and create internal abusive scenes.

If inner abuse is present, love will find the way out. Internalized abusive situations often hold you back from living your full potential. They create a certain hypnosis and make you feel powerless when faced with the abusive part. It takes a lot of courage, discipline and self-love to engage with a part that has caused pain in the past. Jealousy is often part of the abusive scene; it can be internalized jealousy of leaving the "family," old and familiar patterns of living. It will need a warrior's attitude to free yourself and move beyond.

Mindell created the term deep democracy. "Deep democracy is our sense that the world is here to help us become our entire selves, and that we are here to help the world become whole... Deep democracy is based upon those perennial psychologies and philosophies that include global, egalitarian approaches to personal problems." (1992, p.5/6) Mindell advocates that we challenge ourselves and one another to open up and to give space to all parts, internally as well as externally.

It is important to love all the parts, the primary parts as well as the secondary. It can be a delicate balancing act to give attention to the whole person, to support the secondary parts and have compassion for the primary identity. There is great reward for stepping out of the victim position; long-term repressed parts will leap for joy once they are given a voice and are allowed to express themselves. A person who comes in touch with her true nature will feel powerful and rejuvenated. The old identity seems temporarily bland in comparison. It is important, though, to respect the other side as well and not put down the part that has carried on an everyday life, otherwise the person will soon feel criticized and not valued for the suffering and painful experiences she has endured. Self-hate and internal criticism can get constellated which can be experienced as abusive and threatening to the person if the formerly more unconscious parts are now favored. Chronic symptoms need a lot of compassion and challenge the therapist to look at his or her own connection with nature.

In order to be genuinely interested in the exploration of unknown and scary areas of one's personality, one needs a good portion of inner support, self love and the spirit of a warrior and seeker. To live one's childhood dream or life myth is living with that spirit. It is a scary and challenging undertaking to live one's own full potential; it can involve great sacrifices and may bring great joy, richness of experience and growth of personality.

As one gets in contact with the "strange animal," a secondary part of oneself, processing the symptoms over and over again, the attitude towards it changes. One becomes acquainted and the animal seems less strange. Over the years, a kind of friendship emerges and the animal becomes more and more attractive. One might get inspired to live more like the animal, take on its skin and become it. I am reminded of the fairy tale Beauty and the Beast. The beast has to be loved before it will change its skin and transform into a beautiful prince. This transformative pattern appears also in other fairy tales and is an archetypal pattern of maturity and appreciation of the inner beauty.

In my personal experience, my attitude towards the problem area has shifted, as I kept processing the chronic symptoms of my skin. At times, it was difficult to feel deeply connected to my spirit. I went through many struggles with my fate and needed a lot of training and support to develop a warrior's attitude and become really interested and fascinated in the deeper underlying process. With time I developed more fluidity and felt more able to move between all the different parts of personality. Eventually my identity will change so that I will fully identify with my true nature and live the spirit that is waiting to be freed.

## 3. Chapter 3

## METHODOLOGY

### **3.1 Description of methodology**

My research methodology is qualitative. "Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail (Patton, [1980], 1990)

This personal longitudinal in-depth study of my own process of living with a atopic dermatitis (AD) is based on a theoretical framework of process oriented psychology (also Process Work). Sensory grounded information and following the flow of nature are inherent in this paradigm.

Process Work and its application to chronic symptoms are described in chapter four and five of the first part of this work.

I want to show how my chronic AD shows like a constant thread through my life and how it is a continual drive in my self development.

According to Mindell (1985) early childhood dreams or memories contain life patterns and have a mythical aspect. They show larger patterns like chronic body symptoms, relationship issues and problems with the world.

By working on different parts of my childhood dreams I show different aspects of my process.

I was searching for a long time for a specific research method for this study. Presenting my idea of this project to Michael Patton last year freed me to use various methods and piece them all together in a patchwork of approaches.

M. Patton called this research a "multi-method auto- biography." (Seminar on Research Methods and Theory Formulation for Applied Social and Behavioral Science. (1994). Minneapolis).

I am using several methods such as interviews with other people about myself, transcripts of my therapy sessions, personal journal entries and my dream recollections in this research. All these different methods are woven together in order to describe in-depth the patterns of my process.

As part of following my non-linear and unpredictable process I have used a narrative writing style.

### **3.1.2 Description of the methods**

#### **3.1.2.1 Childhood Dreams and Current Dreams:**

Childhood dreams and current dreams have been processed with Process Work tools of amplification and channel change to bring forth the underlying patterns. This method is shown in the therapy sessions in part three. Sensory grounded information is used in order to process material in this way.

According to Mindell (1985) early childhood dreams or memories contain life patterns and have a mythical aspect. They show larger patterns like chronic body symptoms, relationship issues and problems with the world.

Alan James Strachan (1992) researched the connections of childhood dreams and body symptoms.

I describe my two childhood dreams and the connections of the dream patterns with my body symptoms and my overall personal development (see page 66 ff.).

### **3.1.2.2. Interviews:**

I am using an informal conversational interview style which gives me a flexibility in going with the flow of the conversation. I have aimed at exploring information about my body symptoms influencing the various relationships.

By asking questions about people's phantasies and images about my skin I have used a phenomenological approach as it is used in Process Work.

By immersing myself in the material of the interviews and observing my own reactions and feelings that the material brought up in me I followed partially a heuristic method as Moustakas describes (1990).

Moustakas describes heuristic research as a method of discovery of a phenomenon in which the researcher is deeply immersed himself. Through this process of internal search one finds meaning in the experience one is investigating.

I further treated the information in a Process-Oriented way by which I mean that I looked at the problems and symptoms as useful indicators for change and as part of my life process.

### **3.1.2.3 Case examples:**

I described memories of therapy sessions of the past in an anecdotal way. Over the last two years I taped my therapy sessions with two therapists and verbatim transcribed a selection of them. In all therapy sessions, Process Work was applied to my own body symptoms.

## **3.2 Research Design**

The interviews took place during my last visit to Switzerland in April and May of 1994. I described the locations before the interview.

The interview with John who lives in Ireland was done over the phone.

I was guided by some questions that I had previously prepared but was also flexible and let the conversation take its own direction.

Being the researcher of my own process, I was in several roles at once. I was the interviewer, and the object of the interview. I was a family member in a system as well as the observer.

Long term relationships like the ones with relatives often rely on spoken or unspoken communication consensus and can be complex. It was not easy to keep detached awareness of the whole process as well as being aware of my own feelings and reactions as an individual as well as a part of the family system.

Noticing my own nervousness about the complex situation, I wrote the following list of problem areas and worries into my diary:

April 25 1994

The following dream makes me worried about doing these interviews.

I am simultaneously in the street and on the roof of a building and see a scene. I see myself in the street

interviewing people about Silvia and see that there is a woman in the film crew that is part of this action who is aiming to shoot me with a hidden gun in the camera I dash down from the roof and whack the camera out of the woman's hands.

The dream tells me that there is a danger of getting shot in the back - getting criticised where I am least aware.

I will have to be careful to keep my awareness sensors awake.

I am concerned about getting into the family field and losing awareness and therefore recreate my position in the family of being the problem child.

I hope I can stay detached enough so I can have my reactions without just having to react to the whole field.

I am worried that if I disrupt the family consensus too much it will backfire me later and I will end up victimized.

To actually talk about oneself is breaking a unexpressed family consensus.

Transcribing the tapes several months later made me have the reactions because I could hear the unintentional signals of my interviewees better. I could hear the critical tone in my brother's voice and how it did not change much even when I tried to express my feelings and pain. I reacted towards that with anger and pain as I transcribed the tape and I added these reactions into the text. I processed these reactions later and saw some as belonging to the relationship with my brother and others as belonging to my own intrapsychological dynamics.

I included these reactions and analytical comments in the interviews and as comments afterwards.

The conversation with my mother ended up being very long and had to be edited down a lot. The interview developed into a deep conversation about the traumatic time of my father leaving the family and dying subsequently. My mother showed gratitude in having been able to talk about her pain and feelings. We both had strong dreams in the night after this.

The process of transcribing the interviews with all the participants has brought up unexpected emotional reactions in me and has forced me to get into old pain and suffering. This process has been very deep and valuable for my development.

I have worked through layers of my process and moved through pain which has freed me up to detach and aim at leaving old patterns and personal history.

Therapy sessions:

Some of the early therapy sessions are described from memory and are in an anecdotal style. This anecdotal style to describe cases and show significant patterns is used by Jung (1972,1973,1990) and Mindell (1982,1985a, 1985b, 1989, 1992,1993,)

The sessions are transcribed verbatim from audio tapes. I transcribed them and listened afterward to the tapes again.

They have been edited to shorten the text and elucidate the core information to show the main patterns of the session.

Analyzing comments are included in brackets. I emphasize the main patterns and dynamics of the process shown in a specific session.

Journal entries and creative writings;

I have used several journal entries and an essay style of writing to illustrate the experience of living with a chronic itching skin illness.

I have used a process oriented approach in exploring my awareness and following the signals of the unknown phenomena to unfold the experiences.

Inner work:

I inserted inner works that I had either recorded earlier but also some spontaneously arisen situations such as reactions that happened throughout the actual process of transcribing the material.

I have used the same approaches as I have described in the section above.

The following questions have guided me in my research:

- What is my myth in this life?
- Is there a really clear conscious change I create that makes my symptom improve or disappear?
- Why does the symptom come back? When does it come back?
- What is my overall pattern and is it changing over time?
- To what extent is the unpredictable and non-linear character of AD related to culturally disavowed behaviors and characteristics of Western civilization?

### **3.4 My childhood dreams and body symptoms**

As I discussed in the previous section on Process Work, childhood dreams can be seen as visual representations of a long-term intrapsychic pattern that underlies a person's life development. Unraveling a childhood dream will point towards the same life pattern that can also be accessed by processing chronic body symptoms.

I remember two dreams from my childhood. The first one I had when I was about six years old.

#### **3.3.1 Dream 1:**

I am in the forest with a smaller boy who is related to me. Suddenly a witch swoops from behind a hut in the forest and dashes for the boy's penis. I am shocked and dash in between the two to save the boy from the witch.

##### **3.3.1.1 The witch as a figure**

In mythology and fairy tales, the witch has manifold aspects. In many cultures witches are wise women, seeresses, sorceresses and medicine women. The witch has mercurial, intuitive and magic powers. They were and still are feared because of their powers.

Women with special attributes had to tolerate negative attitudes and discrimination - and especially in European culture and religion of the past such women were considered as witches. Any woman who was in any way threatening to the patriarchal system of the time was quickly considered a witch and was often prosecuted and burned or hanged. Witch hunters would agree on special physical marks, like red hair or unusual eyes; obvious skin appearances, like birthmarks, moles, warts, pockmarks, ulcer pimples and freckles, were considered "witch marks" (p.1079).

Hans Biedermann says that in Jungian psychology the witch is the "embodiment of the dark side of the anima, the female aspect of man" (p.386). He further states that in many cultures witches have demonic powers and were often seen as cannibals, sorceresses and generally as the destroyers of male potency, for example by means of the vagina dentata (p.396).

In my eyes, the witch is the sensitive, intuitive and mercurial part of the woman's psyche that is disavowed by the patriarchal society. By not being appreciated it becomes a negative force. Witches are healers and powerful seers and magicians; if this trait is not respected and appreciated, the force turns into a negative power.

Achterberg says that witches and shamans use "flying oils and ointments," which were often potent poisonous oils and chemicals, to get into altered states (p.62f.). Witches and sorceresses have a trickster-like - a mercurial, playful, unpredictable and creative aspect to them.

In my life the witch appears as the mercurial and irrational energy of my body symptoms; they often appear and disappear in unpredictable ways. The swift movement of the witch in my childhood dream is mirrored, for instance, in the way my hives, herpes blisters and allergic reactions can flare up in an instant and disappear just as fast. This irrational and

unpredictable manner is a threat to my normal identity which is often focused on functioning in society and behaving in a reasonable and linear manner.

The witch has the power to cut off my "male" ideas and attitudes about ways of doing things in a linear way. She wants me to focus more on the intuitive, unpredictable and irrational side of things instead of following conventional ideas of power and persona.

I experience this irrational energy as both helpful and a disturbance. In some areas of my personality I can accept it more easily than in others. It is a hindrance, for instance, in situations where I need to study and analyze material in a clear and linear way. Anything that is slightly linear or has any kind of rules to it is hard to follow; the witch is ready to cut it off in one quick swoop. Sometimes I have to inhibit the witch in order to focus on anything at all.

### **3.3.1.2. The boy and the penis**

The boy symbolizes the young man, the son, the young male potential. According to J.C. Cooper (1979) the son is the symbol of the alter ego, the double and the living image.

The boy is the young potential of mainstream and patriarchal society, the father principle. The phallus is the male creative potential which is highly valued in western male-oriented society. This part of my dream needs to develop, too. The boy is young and needs to grow; it is the father principle that has a tendency to be injured.

In my case the boy is my animus or male part which is in danger. It is in danger of being de-potentialized. I have been involved in saving it for many years. I picked up my studies and went back to school in my late twenties in order to save this injured male part of mine. I have chosen partners who needed my help in order to heal their educational abuse scenes and their "father injuries". I have recently become more interested in leaving this pattern and believing more in the wisdom of my intuitive side.

The witch's energy and the energy of the boy and the penis represent also the clash of paradigms - the first representing more the one of modern physics and quantum mechanics in the way of its appearance being unpredictable - and the latter being the more newtonian and mechanical way of looking at life.

### **3.3.1.3 The forest**

The forest is an unknown and vegetative place where the whole interaction happens: the body and specifically the vegetative nervous system. The forest is considered the beyond, the dark, the unconscious. Lots of initiations take place in the forest. (Eliade, 1954)

### **3.3.2. Dream 2:**

The second childhood dream is:

I see a king sitting on a throne. He is getting larger and larger until he disperses totally while laughing an incredible echoing laughter.

#### **3.3.2.1. The king as a figure**

The king is the patriarchal ruler of consciousness. He represents collective values and stands for the father principle. He is also the wise healer and father.

The king in my dream is getting bigger and bigger until he disappears into nothingness. He is expanding and laughing.

I see this as an indication for detachment from the patriarchal authority principle, which is very present in Swiss culture. These cultural norms are expanding and finally dispersing.

The witch threatens to cut off the male part in me at a very early stage if she is not considered. I am protective of the male part in me and terrified by her intensity. I am closer to the cultural norms, try to save them. In the second dream, the drama is intensified on the other side. The patriarchal atmosphere is expanding enormously and does not leave any room for anything else. It is suffocating. The laughter indicates

detachment; reminds me of the laughing Buddha figure. Growing beyond the dimension of this pattern, leaving it, will finally free the mercurial spirit.

I want to look at my childhood dream as a fairy tale with all the parts happening at the same time on all levels. The crystal reflects the witch in a skin symptom at one time; in another moment, the witch is seen in the way my linear thinking process is inhibited or needs to be cut off. The witch is reflected in the way she frees me, makes me independent and focused on myself; she comes through for instance when I spend money irrationally, or in my spontaneity. The witch creates positive as well as challenging aspects to my personality. Sometimes I need to follow her, sometimes I have to hold her down in order to let the potential grow and bring things out of the dark forest of the unconscious into the light of awareness.

I would like the reader to have these ideas in mind as you read the following personal recollection. It is a process in flow - the unfolding of a myth that has a potential direction and is totally open-ended at the same time.

## 4. PART TWO

## THE INTERVIEWS

### ***4.1. Introduction***

I remember an exercise that Dr. Mindell presented in a seminar on life myth and body symptoms. We had to imagine our spirits before birth - choosing the situation of this life. I had an immediate image of a shooting star entering the world's atmosphere - glowing just as my skin often glows - and transforming into a wild woman decorated with flowers and fruit all over her body, dancing on the wooden bridge of Luzern, the city where I was born.

I see this wild flower woman as the fiery and ecstatic side of the witch from my childhood dream. I saw Luzern in central Switzerland as a alchemical vessel. Although I have not much connections with Luzern I spend a lot of time in the mountains.

My spirit chose the introverted and contained culture of Switzerland as a place to cook and transform and become the free spirit that is in my childhood dream.

I imagine this spirit having also chosen all the other facts of my life such as the century in which I was born, my gender, my physical constitution, the cultural and social background.

I would like the reader to have all this in mind while reading this second part which consists of four interviews.

I have chosen four interviews to show the cooking process of my personal development and my chronic body symptoms influencing it in various ways.

The first interview is with my mother from whom I wanted to get further information about the onset of my AD. I also just wanted to experience myself in this relationship and see what kind of reactions I had to what she told me. My brother was interviewed consequently.

I chose my two ex-partners John and Ben to investigate the effect of my symptoms on those relationships.

I am connecting the information with my childhood dream and treating it as part of my personal myth and as a learning process. Therefore I see the information as having external as well as internal value.

By choosing this interview style I re-created the relationship dynamics and fields that made it hard at times to keep awareness about what was my own process and what was constellated by the relationship and how it connected.

Being the researcher of my own process, I was in several roles at once. I was the interviewer, and the object of the interview. I was a family member in a system as well as the observer.

Long term relationships like the ones with relatives often rely on spoken or unspoken communication consensus and can be complex. It was not easy to keep detached awareness of the whole process as well as being aware of my own feelings and reactions as an individual as well as a part of the family system.

Noticing my own nervousness about the complex situation, I wrote the following list of problem areas and worries into my diary:

The following dream makes me worried about doing these interviews.

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I will have to be careful to keep my awareness sensors awake.

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I hope I can stay detached enough so I can have my reactions without just having to react to the whole field.

I am worried that if I disrupt the family consensus too much it will backfire me later and I will end up victimized.

To actually talk about oneself is breaking an unexpressed family consensus.

The process of transcribing the interviews with all the participants brought up unexpected emotional reactions in me and has forced me to get into old pain and suffering. This process has been very deep and valuable for my development. I have worked through layers of my process and moved through pain which has freed me up to detach and aim at leaving old patterns and personal history.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **4.2.1 COMING INTO THE WORLD WITH AN ITCHY SKIN**

My skin has been itchy, red and reactive for all my life. Doctors, therapists, astrologers, psychics, and other healers I have consulted over the years talked about possible birth traumas, or early rejection by my mother as having a negative influence on my condition. I myself have gone over my history numerous times to find the cause of it all. I have not really found any satisfactory answers in the causal paradigm.

The circumstances of my upbringing, the relationship of my parents and the Swiss culture and many more influences might have contributed to my feeling of being a trapped fiery spirit in a body but were certainly not the cause of it.

I was the first born child. My parents had been married for four years. They enjoyed each other's company and had literature and art as their common interest. Up until I was born, my mother was financially supporting the family, while my father was finishing his doctoral work in literature.

My relationship with my mother has been ambivalent. I often felt not quite understood by her for my personality; I felt that I was too complicated, impulsive and unpredictable. I used to feel criticized by her constantly, although she rarely stated her disapproval overtly. At the same time she was overprotective and I often felt smothered by her.

### **4.2. Interview with my mother: April 1994**

In spring of 1994, my mother and I spent three days together in her holiday house in San Bartolomeo, a little village high above the Lago Maggiore in Northern Italy. This is the first weekend in many years I spent with my mother. I now live in the United States and visit home rarely. We are both a little nervous because one of the reasons for our weekend together is that I want to interview her about the early years of my life. I know that it won't be easy to get the answers. I have felt my mother's guilt of having a child with a serious skin condition. I know that she has wondered herself what she did wrong and how she might be responsible for my symptoms. I also remember that she often suffered with me when I was itching on my whole body and couldn't find any relief.

Our relationship has gone through some changes during the past years. I feel that this weekend with her is a chance for both of us. Something in me is shifting and I am ready to see her for the woman she is and let go of the constant mistrust towards her. That Saturday night after dinner I got my tape machine and the questions and I started to ask her about my birth and the early years of my life. The following is a transcript of the interview interspersed with my reactions and comments as well as with memories triggered by the conversation.

Silvia: What happened actually at my birth? Tell me...was it an easy birth? Tell me how it happened.

Mother: Jakob and I lived really close to the hospital. We walked there that evening, August 18. We had actually expected you on the sixteenth. When you

did not arrive, we joked that you probably would arrive on the eighteenth; we hoped anyway. Your great aunt, my father's sister, had a birthday on August 18. Jakob made me get up and down those long stairs twice to make you come faster. Anyway, you eventually arrived at a quarter past midnight on August 19, 1954.

(As I am transcribing this tape, I notice how shy and hesitant I am to ask her any questions at all regarding my birth. She sounds so depressed and I think that she probably feels guilty. I didn't dare to ask her about her tone of voice. I get sad, though, hearing her.)

Silvia: How did the actual process of the birth go?

Mother: It went really well. It all seemed a little long - but you were my first child, so I didn't really have anything to compare the whole experience with. After a while, when the baby did not come and it was getting late, the nurses sent Jakob home. They had me ready but the baby was not ready to come. The birth was not advanced enough.

After a while, I started to have strong labors. I could hardly say the phone number for the nurse to call Jakob who was at home asleep. He just about made it in time back to the hospital.

Silvia: Oh, I didn't know he was present at my birth...

(I am surprised that he was there. I don't think that was all that usual in those days that men were in the delivery room.)

Mother: Yes.. he was there and he helped...

Silvia: And ... well did it go well? And the doctor.. was he a nice doctor?

Mother: There were two midwives who delivered you. The doctor came and visited me in the morning. At the time women started to give birth following the painless birth method. My friend Marina had taken a course and we prepared ourselves for the birth with breathing exercises, pregnancy gymnastics, and all the natural methods of giving birth without pain. It was a very new thing in those days. Your dad came to some of the classes, too.

Silvia: Did I scream when I came out?

(I want to know if my lungs were working properly, since I had been dealing with asthma for all of my life as well.)

Mother: Yes.. you were totally normal.. Everything was really good and you were a regular cute baby.

(She keeps affirming that there was nothing strange with me or any of the procedures. She sounds depressed, though. I wonder if she criticizes herself internally for anything that happened with me and my body.)

Silvia: And when exactly did my skin problems start?

Mother: Well, actually already as we left the hospital .. you had two little pimples.. in the face. They just would not disappear. The doctor told me that it was quite a usual thing with newborns. He said it was from the dairy.. I could not really breast-feed you. I had very little milk and you never wanted to drink... So I stopped giving you dairy and we fed you goat milk. But your pimples still didn't

disappear and the pediatrician said that it was a baby eczema and it would disappear later.

Silvia: Eating was a problem with me; I remember you telling me.

Mother: (with pain in her voice) You really didn't eat much at all ... You just blew the food all over the kitchen. It was difficult to feed you.. You would hardly take anything in... You were a big worry. Also later you didn't grow for a long time.

(I must have hesitated to live. There was the free spirit already in my spattering the food around the kitchen. I didn't want to go along with any expectations.)

Silvia: (jokingly) Surely you would have wanted to sell me sometimes.. (laughs)

(As I write this down, I have a reaction to my own statement. I notice how provocative I am with my mother in order to bring out her ambivalent feelings towards me and the rejection I have felt in the background for a long time. Nevertheless, I am also hurt by what I see now as my internalized self-hatred.)

Mother: Well, not selling you... no. But I have to say that I often I wondered why I had to have a child like that..

I was so exhausted.. and on edge with my nerves. It was really difficult. Why did this poor innocent child have to suffer so much?

(I am so glad to hear her admit that she had some feelings of rejection towards me. I wonder if she started to have them as I was sick or if she had them before my birth. A part of me wants to know, and another part prefers to hang onto the dream of having been loved unconditionally. I dare not ask at the time.)

Mother: When you were about four or so you started to have asthma. Unbelievable, one more thing... The rashes spread and got stronger. We were constantly smearing your poor little body all over with different creams and tar ointments. You could hardly sleep; you would toss and turn all night and cry. I guess when we put you to bed, your skin started to itch because of the warmth of the bed. You scratched like crazy, day and night. It was painful to see you in such distress, to watch you suffer and destroy your poor skin ... and to be helpless with it all. It was heart breaking. (She shakes her head in pain.) You would scratch yourself bloody. I had to dress you with gloves all the time. It was painful to watch. At times we had to protect you from scratching yourself bloody so that you would not get any infections. We would put your little arms into cardboard tubes. This was difficult to do. I was not sure what was worse, you not being able to move or not being able to scratch yourself. Actually, you often slept better with the tubes on. But it was hard to tie you like this. We used to sleep in shifts, Jakob and I. He used to work late at home preparing for his classes. He looked after you until he went to bed after midnight. I got up after that whenever you cried to feed you or put ointment on your skin..

(As I write this down, I hear my mother's suffering. I am crying. I see her feelings of guilt. I feel so sad that she had to carry this whole burden. What a difficult thing to have a sick child and not be able to help! So far, I have not really allowed myself to see her side and have compassion and understanding for it. I have mostly felt hurt by the rejection I felt in the background, which made it impossible for me to really feel close and connected to my mother. I saw it as her flaw that she was not able to give me the unconditional love I deserved as her child. I did not really want to see the difficulty of the situation from her perspective.

Being confronted with and having compassion for both sides brings me to a tense spot inside myself. I notice it as I start to scratch myself while thinking about and transcribing this part of the interview. I feel so uncomfortable. I feel my mother's pain and my own imprisonment. Do I feel guilty for having been such a burden? I imagine how it must have been for the spirit in this little body. The irritation created by the sheets, the blankets and the expectation that I should be quiet.

I am dreaming into this situation now as an adult. I can feel the pain and agony of the situation for both sides. I wonder if my parents were aspiring to have a harmonious relationship, a safe and cozy middle class life, thereby leaving out the wilder, more unpredictable and free parts in both of them and thus not giving expression to their full nature in relationship.

Apparently, my father was very pedantic with the care of the baby, with my mother and with life in general. He took care of me a lot as a baby and would terrorize my mother. He would make a scientific project out of weighing me and would pedantically feed me on time. I start to itch at the mere thought of such control over my basic needs. My mother must have felt inadequate and watched all the time. She must have felt imprisoned. As I imagine the atmosphere in that young family, my skin starts to itch. I freak out, want to scream and cry in pain. I feel pain for the whole situation and everybody involved.

Another memory comes to mind. I used to sit awake all night because of my asthma attacks. My mother and I sat in bed and she would rub my back and help me inhale. We would drop off to sleep for a while, until the next attack cramped my chest again. This was a way for me to get the intimacy with my mother I wished for and also withdrew from. My symptoms helped me to get attention, love and intimacy. I wonder why I was so shy around contact and intimacy in the first place.)

Silvia: I know you tried different medical approaches and healing methods.

Mother: We tried different ointments the pediatrician prescribed but nothing really helped much. A friend told me about this well known homeopath whom I took you to see. He was really concerned with your state and asked all kinds of questions. He gave me herbs to bathe you in and ointments and a homeopathic remedy: arsenic drops.

Silvia: Arsenic? Really?

Mother: Yes.. arsenic. Your skin started to flake off. Your whole body peeled. Your whole skin kept peeling, again and again. We kept hoping that at one point your skin would just stop shedding. It was an endless circle for months. Your skin did not improve at all and we stopped the treatment.

Silvia: It is like a wild animal that doesn't want to be tamed and kept quiet....

(If only I could have let that wild animal out!)

Mother: Ooh, it was crazy ..

Silvia: I understand that it must have been an incredible scene for you as parents to look at this suffering all the time. I must have been a huge burden for you. How painful.

How was all of that for your relationship? I mean, did it affect your relationship with my father?

Mother: No,.. not really. I don't think I can say that. Your father was very helpful. He used to change and wash diapers and help a lot with the health care. He suffered a lot, too, with you being so sick all the time.

Silvia: Did you notice if there were some outer influences that made my skin get better and worse?

Mother: Well, the only obvious thing to me was temperature changes, from cold to warm or vice versa, especially in winter. I remember going for walks with you in winter. I'd wrap you all up in warm things and as soon as we were down the street out in the cold air, you started to itch like crazy...

(I remember coming home from skiing at my grandparent's house. As soon as I entered the heated living room, I would start to itch.)

Silvia: Did my rashes appear especially on the typical places, on the inside of my arms, back of my knees, on my neck, my face?

Mother: Yes, absolutely. On those typical places, but really your whole body was covered.

(One of my first childhood memories comes up here. I am standing in the hallway of our apartment, crying: "Mama, mama, it burns!" I must have wet my diapers and the pee burns on my open and inflamed skin.)

Silvia: Can you remember what my skin looked like when I was a small child?

Mother: Yes. Well, I kind of got used to it.... It almost became normal for us that you had a skin like that. It was red and inflamed, as if it "bloomed." (My mother makes a upward rising movement and a blowing sound.) Every time you had one of those attacks, I got really scared. Even nowadays, the other day when you had some red blotches in your face, I got really worried again.. It always affects me deeply.. This fear comes over me and I am afraid that it will start again.. I get into a panic..

(I notice myself going into a slight trance and starting to feel depressed. This is so difficult for me to talk about, having red blotches in my face. I am in a complex and feel really uncomfortable and wish I could physically move away. It really puts me off to hear my mother say that she gets into a panic. I just feel like pulling back. I start to feel intruded upon and somehow smothered. Her overprotectiveness is smothering. My body creates a boundary. It signals: red, stay away! I see her reaction connected to her own fear of emotions. She gets easily overwhelmed by my emotions or by my skin's outbreaks. She can't handle them. Therefore I don't feel recognized for who I really am. I feel suppressed and misunderstood.

I noticed these difficult feelings during our conversation, yet I was too uncomfortable to bring them into the conversation. Not reacting makes me feel hopeless.

I also wonder if my mother was against me blooming. She never dared to bloom herself. It overwhelmed her to see me breaking out. She tried to stop me, to suppress my emotions, especially the ones she couldn't tolerate in herself. My mother tells me later that she has blood circulation problems and gets overwhelmed by her body symptom. She admits to suppressing her own emotions because she is afraid of them. She also tells me that my father did not support her in expressing her fears, emotions and any of her difficulties in life.)

Mother: I mean about today. I just used what I noticed today as an example..

(She is now making excuses, feeling that she must have touched a sore spot. I feel uncomfortable and am in a complex about my red patches in my face. My skin reacts: I was shy to say that I was also nervous about spending a whole weekend with my mother. I was scared and wondered if I could keep my own boundaries and my identity. If I would have been more in touch with my own feelings and able to express them I would have cried.)

Mother: But when you were still living at home and I saw your skin break out, I got into a panic somehow and thought: Oh my god, it will start again.. And then I quickly wanted to do something about it.. That is something that I always did..

(Somehow she must feel guilty about trying to suppress nature. I remember those situations very well. I know how much I withdrew at those times. I felt misunderstood and rejected and not appreciated for who I really was. I felt not really understood by my mother and decided early on that I would keep my fantasies to myself. I often felt enthusiastic about things. My mother's reactions were aimed at calming me down and taming my emotional reactions, which I believe caused my excited skin to break out even more. I had high flying ideas and fantasies which I did not dare to express for fear of being thought of as weird, overly excitable and unrealistic. I started to have a rich internal life and go on internal dreaming journeys at night. I often could not sleep at night because of the itching. I would just lie there and imagine adventurous stories or read books about adventurers.

As I am transcribing this part, I am experiencing a lot of heat in my body. I am sweating and itching and feel very uncomfortable. My body is glowing with heat. I try to work with this experience and instantly have an image of a huge egg with red cracks like flashes of lightening running across its surface. I close my eyes and follow the lightening flashes internally. Zigzag lines flash along the surface of the egg. I am excited about the vision and start to move like the flashes I see. I get up from my desk and make abrupt and sudden movements that match the flashes I see. I get all excited and energetic. Flashes of creativity are shooting through me. I am shaking and moving and feel loose and free now. This is the medicine for me, the reaction to my mother's fear about being too emotional. Instead of trancing out and feeling depressed I need to crack out of this egg and free my energy, my excitement and my creativity. It is the inhibiting egg of my family and cultural background.

Silvia: You got pregnant again. Were you afraid the next baby would have the same illness?

Mother: Yes, I was worried. But we wanted to have another child. Your brother was easy going, thank god.

Silvia: Was it the right time for you to have a child when you got pregnant with me?

Mother: Well, maybe not quite at that particular time.. We were married four years and your dad was working on his Ph.D. But, yes, we were ready for you. I was already thirty years old... We actually wanted to have three children. I got pregnant two more times after your brother's birth. I had a miscarriage and a ectopic pregnancy.

Silvia: Twice? I didn't know that you lost two babies..

(I am surprised about not having known that. Why did she never talk about that with me? Shame? Guilt? I didn't dare to ask. She might have wanted more children, but her body might have rejected them - who knows.)

Silvia: Tell me about your relationship with Jakob. How was it?

Mother: We were very happy for many years. We had a deep and connected relationship. Until he started to have an intimate relationship with this other woman. Suddenly everything changed, and I was completely out of the picture. That was the most painful time of my life. I felt so humiliated by him. I nearly went crazy with pain and chagrin. I was so confused. Suddenly everything that we had built up together was not valuable anymore and I felt dumped. I tried to be generous and thought that it was just a phase he was going through, a kind of mid-life crisis. But it went on. He wanted to get divorced because his partner got pregnant. Eventually she had twins. You remember that horrible time. It was traumatic for all of us.

(I remember now that I must have picked up signals of a coming disaster years before it happened. It probably started when I was about nine years old. I had lots of secret fears I did not dare to tell anyone because I was afraid of being thought of as weird. I kept them to myself. I had a recurrent fantasy of a war breaking out. On my way to and from school through the pastures I would imagine soldiers appearing over a specific hill. I would often stand and gaze, frozen in fear. With strange anticipation I would wait to see the soldiers' bayonets and helmets appear on the horizon over that hill.)

Silvia: Yes, I know. That time was very traumatic for all of us.

(I remember the day my grandparents came down from the mountains to visit. My parents had coffee on the porch, and suddenly a furious argument erupted between them. My mother had kept my father's affair secret for two years until his parents finally found out. They came down from the mountains and wanted to take care of the situation. My grandfather slapped my father in the face, which was a very fiery thing to do, yet also painfully judgmental. At the time, of course, I thought my grandfather was right. I was infuriated, disappointed, and felt deeply hurt like never before. That Saturday afternoon when I learned about my father's affair, a world collapsed for me and I lost the innocence of childhood.

My father had been a hero for me. He was the one I wanted to impress; I wanted to be like him. His affair felt like a personal betrayal to me and I was very angry and hurt. I turned hostile and angry towards him. I had some furious outbursts to which he reacted in an authoritarian way. I did not respect him anymore and missed a more personal reaction. My skin was in flames during that time. It broke out like a bush-fire. I ended up in hospital.

Silvia: Could you imagine that my rashes were a reaction to that oppression of the whole atmosphere?

Mother: Well maybe. I remember that your skin was really bad about a year before he left the family. You had to be hospitalized then, I remember.

Silvia: He terrorized us kids, too. I remember how he treated Andrea really badly, put him down all the time for not reading books, for this and that.. It was really bad. I felt that he also really loved me. But then, he was very judgmental, and one of his stern looks or judgmental remarks was enough for me to know that a potential danger zone was present. I was sensitive to moods and would feel the

underlying negative attitudes. I then would rather hold back and go internal than confront him. If I let the energy out that was stored in my skin, I would have been aggressive and rebellious. Of course, my skin symptoms are partially inherited. I think, though, that my allergies were often triggered by emotional suppression. There were all the subtle put downs that I could not really defend myself against. I was too much of a good child..

Mother: After Jakob moved out and then later died, you became pretty rebellious, explosive and outspoken. I guess that was actually after dad had left home. Around that time you certainly let your spikes out. You were rebelling a lot. You confronted your father a few times, I remember. I didn't really know about all the things you did in those days. You were out and about a lot with all kinds of people. I didn't want to know. I didn't really have control... (She sounds guilty and depressed.) I felt helpless with the whole situation, bringing up two children as a single mother.. Maybe I should have been more strict.. I don't know..

Silvia: (laughing) Thank god you weren't more controlling! I think you actually did a great job.. I really appreciated that you were not so strict.. It was a relief.

Mother: Well I couldn't tie you up.. (laughs)

Silvia: No way...! (laughs) I remember that my skin as really good in those years..

Mother: Yes, that is true,... definitely.

Silvia: I think the more I lived my wildness in my life, the less my skin had to go wild and go grrrrr... (makes growling sounds) and break out. Could you see that?

Mother: Yes.. that makes sense.

Silvia: I think when my father did not live at home anymore, I had more permission to be wild and crazy; my skin liked that. My father had been very inhibiting. For me, his death was a kind of liberation.

Mother: I know. It was for all of us. The time before he died was way more painful than the actual death.

Silvia: I remember how free and liberated I felt after my father's death. It was the end of an era of suffering.

Instead of mourning his death, I felt relieved and liberated.

(I remember the day of my father's memorial service in the following way: I remember thinking at the memorial service as the urn with the ashes was put into the niche in the cemetery wall in Splügen: I will never come and visit here. If he is a free spirit now, why would he be here?)

I used to sit at a specific place and think of my father. I would imagine him as a spirit flying high up in the mountains. Maybe he was visiting his favorite alp where, as a boy, he looked after the village cows and read books. I still visit that rock to have conversations with him, shed tears about the pain he caused me and find out what he really was all about. I dream about how he would have lived, if he had been supported to really follow his heart and his dreams. I can see how he tried to break out of a cozy and safe nest; maybe it was too tight for him. As I am writing this I wish I would have seen him just before he died. Maybe I would have seen him being closer to his true spirit. He must have felt like a caged animal, at times, living with the situation he had created: two families he loved that could not be together. He must have felt torn inside a lot, without any internal or external support for his situation. Swiss middle class culture in the

seventies was not very supportive of following one's heart, especially if that meant stepping outside of the mainstream lifestyle.

Sitting on that rock in Splugen, meditating, I could see the different aspects and, for moments, I could let go of my own anger and pain. I was relieved for myself and for him, too. I used to cry tears of ecstasy and joy about being liberated. I would imagine myself as a spirit flying high up on the mountain tops in the cool crisp air.

This makes me think of the king in my second childhood dream that is getting bigger and bigger until he disperses into nothingness with a huge echoing laughter. I see it as the dispersion of the patriarchal and rigid part - shedding of the skin of all kinds of norms that are too restrictive.

#### **4.2.2 Comments:**

The night after this interview I dreamt that mushrooms had grown out of my left thigh. My mother and I were looking at them, admiring their shinyness, wondering if we could use them for the risotto that we were about to cook. She tried to carefully cut them off my leg with a small pair of scissors but I told her that this would not work since the mushrooms were attached to my nervous system.

I associate with this dream the following:

I see it as an alchemical dream where my internal mother is trying to detach some magic, unpredictable and "fast growing" ingredients such as mushrooms - in order to use them as part of the Italian dish we are about to cook. The mushrooms represent the mercurial energy of the witch and the nervous system. My "internal mother" - who is often hopeless and depressed - needs this element especially.

The image of mushrooms had come up in a therapy session with Arny Mindell a few months prior to this conversation. I will describe this session in part three).

## **5. CHAPTER 5**

### ***5.1. The culture I grew up in***

Growing up as a Swiss woman had a strong impact on how I dealt with myself and with my body symptoms. Swiss culture with its rather puritan ethics supports moderate behavior and limited emotional expression; it emphasizes coping with problems in a 'masculine' kind of way. People are relatively quiet, introverted and unemotional and tend to focus on their material and work life. To be too extroverted and show emotions is almost suspicious. I remember my grandmother as she saw a few girls giggling and talking loudly in the street, shaking her head and saying that they must surely be drunk. This kind of attitude made me hide my excitement and repress my wildness for fear of being "too much " - too weird and unrealistic.

To keep a lid on the emotional expression was an attitude which was strongly supported by my father as well as my mother although my father - by leaving the family - made an attempt to break out of a conventional pattern.

Secretly I dreamed about an impulsive and wild lifestyle - something like the energy of the witch in my childhood dream - but my family's and society's attitudes inhibited that part of me. I adapted to these expectations outwardly as well as internally and projected the freedom of expressing strong emotions like passion, anger and romantic feelings onto the more expressive people of Mediterranean countries which I loved for that reason. I often traveled in Italy and France, searching for a pattern of how to live more of this side of myself.

The wild and fiery symptoms emerging swiftly out of my skin were expressions of a wilder and more fiery kind of energy that was internally as well as culturally repressed. They therefore became a kind of disavowed minority position within my psyche longing to be freed and lived.

### ***5. 2 Interview with Peter: April 1994***

My brother Peter who is five years younger than I chose a more conventional lifestyle than I did. He lives a family life and has two children. My mother, brother and I were a small and close family after my father died. We did not have much contact over the years after that though.

I feel I went my own way - and distanced myself from the family - got married and divorced twice - went back to school - traveled and moved to the overseas eventually.

I visited my brother's family in April 1994. This interview was the first time my brother and I really talked about ourselves and each other. We each talked a lot about our

experiences of the painful breakup of our parents - of which I only included a little bit in this conversation.

I was interested in how he experienced my having all my various symptoms and what kind of impact that had on him. I was surprised that he had little recollection of my experiences.

I realized that the way he must have repressed a lot of feelings and reactions must have been a big part of the communication style of the family and part of what my skin somatically reacted to. He talks about himself suffering from the very same thing: the taboo of expressing emotions and feelings.

He must have repressed many of his feelings about his being oppressed and undervalued by our father. I was very surprised that he has hardly any memory of who our father was; Peter was fourteen when he died. I remember how my father often put him down for not being interested in reading books and not liking school at all.

My brother was and still is a dreamer. He dreams of traveling and freedom, yet actually leads a conventional, financially stable and secure life. This is very much a Swiss attitude to reality which does not leave much room for feelings, emotions and the more subtle things in life. It was a big event in our relationship to actually talk about ourselves. I was relieved to hear his impressions of the family and of myself, although my brother's underlying critical attitude and was painful to me.

I worked on this interview several times and had different reactions to it. It was difficult for me to keep my awareness about my own feelings in the situation, as I noticed many signals that indicated criticism. The slightly cool and distanced communication style is partly a Swiss style and partly the style of the family. Peter himself talks about how he suffers from the taboo of being openly and directly critical.

It was powerful to notice how I became part of the family and cultural field again as soon as I entered it. During this conversation I was somewhat aware of the communication style, yet unable to break out of it and to bring in my hurt feelings about his indirect criticisms which are difficult to convey in writing since they were mostly in the tone of voice. Listening to the tape I had emotional reactions which do not all belong to the actual interaction with Peter but are my internal work. I felt that somehow I went back to childhood and reenacted the family atmosphere and had my emotional reactions instead of the somatic ones. This was a powerful experience and was very helpful for my awareness and healing.

Silvia: How was it for you to have a sister who was always sick and had lots of health problems?

Peter: Well, I never really thought that you had big problems.. I knew that you had body symptoms, but I never thought that you were really impaired by any of your symptoms.

(His tone of voice is cool and reserved).

Silvia: That is interesting..

(Actually, I am shocked and hurt that he did not notice. I am hurt that he never tried to find out more how it was for me. But at the same time I must have given signals that didn't invite helpful focus.)

Silvia: I, too, must have repressed a lot of things. I was having cortisone treatment and the symptoms were therefore manageable. It must have been worse when I was a baby. But I remember that I missed school a lot with my asthma attacks at night when the weather would change. And the hay fever, that was a drag. And then later, in my twenties, it was really bad.

(It is amazing when I remember what my mother told me about how much I suffered and itched and never slept. I must have put all the feelings in the freezer.

I must have repressed my suffering and did not show it. I was not constantly feeling a victim of my symptoms. It is true that I could lead a "normal" life. I had a disability that was manageable. I had the privilege to not have to focus too much on it. The allergic constitution and the chronic symptoms were part of my identity and I didn't have other experiences to compare with. Looking back I see the situation as follows:

I grew up with a labile health as my parents called it. I "always had something wrong with me". I don't remember not having blocked sinuses, a runny nose, itchy eyes, irritated skin in various stages, carbuncles, infections, asthma attacks, hay fever as soon as the first flower appeared in the spring. In winter I had a runny nose because of dust and heating, bladder infections, constipation, etc. As a child I didn't really make a big thing out of it. Later on it disturbed me more. I was on cortisone treatment for as long as I can remember.

I learned to cope with all my symptoms; they were a drag, but I tried to repress the disturbances in order to go on with my life. I didn't want to know about being sick, unless I really had to stay in bed. I remember being irritated and bored when the grown-ups would show concern about me and ask my mother about my health. I didn't want to know about it, except when I could use it to my advantage. As a child I loved reading books. They allowed me to escape this reality and enter into a different space and time. Some nights I would secretly read all night, ride with the hero of the book through the desert or sail a ship through a stormy sea. I would be exhausted in the morning and fake having had an asthma attack during the night so I could stay home and read some more. I feel I got more attention and freedom than Peter because of being the "problem child" ).

Silvia: I'm wondering how that was for you that I got much more attention from our parents because of my symptoms? I always had to be taken to the doctor because there was always something wrong with me.. Do you remember me

having my daily itch and allergy attacks after dinner and being sent to take my antihistamine tablet?

Peter: I don't remember specific instances but I guess I thought that was just part of you.

(I remember sitting at the dinner table at the age of about seven or so. My parents are talking. They talk in French so that us children would not understand what they were saying. I think I got bored with just sitting there. I felt left out. I wanted to take part in the conversation. If I had not been such a "good child," I might have screamed or interrupted their conversation. I often wondered what it was that we were not allowed to hear. Did they talk about money, about sex, about some gossip, about some criticism of someone they didn't want us to know out of fear we would tell the person concerned? Who knows. I got impatient anyway and must have started to scratch my face. That was disturbing to my father. He sat beside me at the dinner table. He sent me off to the bathroom to take my antihistamine tablet. I felt misunderstood. I felt shut up. I remember how I shut down inside in those moments. I retreated into a private little world. I left the dinner table to go to my room and read. I read of adventures, of Winnetou, the American Indian chief of the Apaches, a gentle hero. I loved to read romantic adventure stories.)

Peter: I did not know how you suffered and how you were impaired. It must not have been much talked about in our family. Like everything, it was probably brushed under the table. (frustrated and angry) Nobody ever really talked about problems. We were all very indirect with each other and skirted around every possible problem or conflict. Anger and frustrations were shushed. "Don't make a big thing out of nothing! Don't get excited! I don't see why you have to get so upset, it's just a small thing..." If I had a problem, got frustrated or just expressed a different idea, I would always end up feeling as if I was off and weird for having had the reaction I had.

Silvia: (Agreeing with him, being frustrated about that too) I remember our father suppressed any kind of opposition to his opinions and thus created an atmosphere where no one dared to say anything. There was an underlying attitude of: get it over with and cope.

Peter: I feel I never really knew my father. I was too small to remember. I remember my grandfather. He was a tyrant, a patriarch. Surely my father was a tyrant, too. He was so intolerant and strict and I guess my father must have been somewhere similar..

Silvia: Very critical and judgmental.. Yes, he was a patriarch, and feelings and emotions were not quite valued in his reality.

(We have this family trauma in the background that keeps us from having any confrontation. The time when my father left the family and had his new relationship was traumatic for all of us, including him, I am sure. He did something that he could morally not stand up for and therefor terrorized my mother. He was abusive to her. She did not

know how to get help to stand up for herself against him. She believed in love and did not dare to fight. He got punished by his parents who disowned him. I think that he got so freaked out with all the problems his actions created that he got very sick and died. It is a terrible story. He was a tragic man really. I see that now. He must have been incredibly lonely.

He had a lot of forces against him. Family values in middle class Switzerland in the seventies were pretty strong.

I see my father's attempt to leave this conventional life as one of living his free spirit. Although I suffered so much in that time I can also look at it now as a teaching for me.

He lead the way in his attempt to go his way. He followed his impulses instead of staying in a situation for convention's sake. This is what the witch in my childhood dream is trying to teach me too.

In following a similar attempt in distancing myself I cannot expect to get a lot support from the other family members.

At the time I did not understand this and suffered a lot. My skin was in flames - was it a sign to follow my impulses more too. I was fourteen at that time and ended up in hospital for a month.)

Silvia: If you were to imagine my skin as a phenomenon out in nature, how did that skin look to you?

Peter: A volcano ... It was burning on all ends.. I remember when you were a child and later, you had skin outbreaks on your scalp.. Mama would go through your scalp and apply cream to the spots. That looked to me like trying to tape up the fiery holes of a volcano.. To me it looked like you were trying to extinguish the fire, and the fire came out of all ends and edges.. But I think the force of nature is stronger. It finds other ways to emerge from it's depths. You can tape it up, and it opens somewhere else.

Silvia: That is a good picture. I like it. I was a volcano. What do you think would I have needed to do to let the fire out more instead of it being extinguished?

Peter: Well, our family would have needed to change around being more open to conflict. Instead of putting a lid on anything that looked inconvenient... If the energy could have flowed freely the volcano would have had little outbursts and smoke coming out... it would not have had to be so explosive...

Silvia: (laughing) yes, really... Just as a matter of interest - what kind of nature phenomena were you if you look at yourself? Can you make a picture of yourself..?

Peter: (laughing) The wind.. I like to have a door open all the time. I don't like to be enclosed in situations. All the different obligations that a family brings with itself are sometimes a burden. Then I need to dream of travel and stuff...

Silvia: Aha, you have a strong drive for freedom too....  
So can you imagine that my not living the energy of the volcano could have oozed out in my skin outbreaks?

Peter: Yes. That's what it looked like..

Silvia: I think I realized the full impact of my symptoms when they all broke out so vehemently in my mid twenties after having suppressed them for so many years with cortisone. They really broke loose after I stopped the cortisone treatments. I entered a big crisis. That is when the volcano really erupted..

Peter: Yes I remember. We had little contact at that time.  
I think you isolated yourself. You almost became a stranger to me - to us. There was something like a protective coat around you. I guess it had something to do with your illness. We didn't talk about it. It just kind of made a distance.. this barrier.

(The protective coat is an accurate picture of what my skin was partially doing for me - it protected from getting back into my old life style. I needed to leave my internal and external family to make the changes I needed to make. I had hoped for understanding but I realized later that I was doing the same thing as my father - distancing myself from the family.)

Silvia: I was down in the dumps at that time and criticized myself for having all these symptoms and being out of control with my "normal life" that I had to hide away..

Peter: Well.. I remember that whenever I saw you, you were really distant. There were so many barriers. Our communication did not really go well anymore. It was blocked. We lived in different places. We each were in a relationship and went in different directions. I didn't know how to make contact with you... It was not so easy to get in contact with John. He was only interested in his own painting and stuff that I knew nothing about..

Silvia: (I feel criticized, sound guilty) I know. I tried to include him in the social scenes; it was stressful for me. I felt protective of him. I was like a middle person. It was such a stress for me. I did not realize that being in this relationship was too limiting for me. I was constantly focused on becoming functional again in order to keep the relationship status quo. I had no idea that I needed to change and that the relationship needed to change in order for me to heal again. I felt that there was something wrong with me as a person because I could hardly cope with the symptoms. It was very difficult for me to talk about my suffering. I was so ashamed about being weak, sick and helpless. I could hardly even admit to myself that I needed help. It was too scary and risky to show my vulnerability. I suffered

like an injured animal and withdrew into my cave and closed the door. It was the only way I knew.

Peter: We just didn't really know how..to get closer to you..

Silvia: I was so depressed.. .. I think people often don't realize the impairment that a skin disease such as the one I have, can create.. It can practically ruin your life.. I was so weak and run down and raw mentally.. so confused.. It was a relief to be alone..

Peter: Aha.. wow.. but the problem is that this barrier stayed and never really dissolved ... You just made different barriers later - you studied and made yourself busy... you are always so busy...

(I am hurt by the way he keeps criticizing me. He must be critical because I am following myself in what I am doing and thus going against the family consensus. I am thus following the father's pattern and against the culture's consensus that doesn't support women in changing partners, being independent and following their studies.)

Silvia: Well I enjoy what I am doing at the same time as struggling with it..

Peter: I know .. But you keep yourself separate all the time. First you withdraw because of your illness and then because of your studies... I think what I also don't understand is why you got married again.. . so soon after you split up with John..

Silvia: Well. I met someone new and started a relationship... what 's so wrong with that?

Peter: Nothing, but with that relationship you closed yourself off again from us... we had only little contact.. and then you moved to the U.S.

Silvia: Oh, I didn't realize that you really wanted more contact. You accuse me of making a barrier. Come on now! You admit that you don't like writing letters .. which I have noticed. I reached out many times to you and did not get much response from you. I think you are as responsible for the barrier between us...

Peter: That is true. I admit I am not the best when it comes to communication. I enjoyed that you shared things about your life with me last night. It was good to talk and share ideas and experiences. Now I can imagine a bit better what you are doing and how you are living in the United States,... your studies and things..

Silvia: I was so happy to talk about all that.. I was happy to feel that you wanted to know. You wanted to know and understand me..

Peter: I enjoyed it too

### **5.2.1. Comments:**

I love my brother at the same time as I am critical about his non-feeling style. I think that he is partially jealous about me being able to lead a more independent life style.

Riding back to Zurich after having the conversation with Peter I was totally exhausted and felt emotionally bruised. Being back in Switzerland and sensing the underlying value system as well as the family field was heavy on my body. I need a thick skin for that.

As I started to work on the transcription of this tape about six months later I moved through different stages.

One stage of my work was to hear the distance of the interaction and all the underlying criticism as a fact. To have it on tape was helpful to me and supported my perception. That was the air I breathed as I grew up. That was a big part of what my body reacted to and got "in-flamed" about.

I heard myself on the tape being hurt and getting distant which made me aware of all the feelings that were stored away.

It is difficult to know what to do with all those feelings that don't all belong in the relationship interaction but are an internal interaction.

I realized this dynamic during the interview and reacted to what I thought belonged in the relationship interaction.

The dynamic of the childhood dream is happening in the way I unconsciously (the witch in the skin) cut off and distance myself from the patriarchal rigid Swiss value systems. I partially project that onto my brother and partially he does represent that.

## 6. CHAPTER 6

### 6.1 *The ride into the Underworld*

Looking back to the beginning of my illness and relationship crisis - having reached more detachment - I see this challenging time as a period of initiation and transformation of my life and identity. Initiation processes - as Mircea Eliade (1939) says often require a descent into hell, into the dark of life before one can reappear as a renewed person. This archetypal pattern of death and rebirth takes different forms and is usually a grappling with fear and physical and psychic limitations. The normal identity gets challenged and "dismembered" and sheds its skin in painful and scary ways.

Mindell (1993) says that

"Chronic illness, feelings of being torn asunder by opposing forces and near death experiences frequently have a goal of "cleansing you from your own self and refilling you with nothingness or with pure nature. (p.48)"

Eliade says that dismemberment scarification and tattooing are symbols of initiatic mutilation and outward signs of marking death and resurrection. In some shamanic cultures and cults, by whipping and rubbing with stinging leaves and nettles that create intense itchiness, initiatic dismemberment and death is symbolised.

During my personal "descent into hell" the beginning words to Dante's *Divina commedia* came to mind: "In mezzo della mia vita mi ritrovai in una selva oscura..." (In the midst of my life I found myself in a dark forest) I felt as if I was riding down into hell - a dark murky scary place...

I remember the beginning of my illness crisis in about the following way:

Moldy smells of dark fear arise from the underworld and envelope my brain with a haze. I am panicked and fight to keep afloat. I feel in danger of being pulled down into the murky swamps of gloom.

I suffer from insomnia. I spend endless nights in a half wakeful state. I itch and sweat constantly. The nights are filled with the darkest worries, huge shadows of sombre threats. I toss and turn. I tear at my body, helplessly. I cannot find peace. I am thirsty, irritable, scared. I am scared of death, though, unconsciously. I am scared of not being able to function in the world anymore. I am afraid to lose my job, my relationship, my livelihood.

Deep down inside, I knew that a big change needed to happen. I was scared of it and held onto my hopes of a quick healing. I was a shipwrecked person at high sea holding on to the fantasy of rescue. My partner, although I thought he was compassionate, was more

interested in his creative project than in my rescue. He was preoccupied with working on his novel. I felt very alone and isolated. I felt not really understood by him and did not get the help and guidance I needed.

In search of healing my symptoms, I went to see an acupuncturist. My skin rashes had been getting stronger and stronger. I had such an exaggerated reaction to the first treatment that she sent me to a homoeopath, thinking that homoeopathy might be more helpful for my condition. The homoeopathy intensified my skin condition even more. It brought out the whole process of years of suppressing the symptoms with cortisone treatment.

Homoeopathy expects an initial amplification of the symptoms, which indicates that the medication is matching the physical condition and that the underlying process is starting to come out in order to heal subsequently. My symptoms flared up in the most incredible ways. The reactions would not disappear within the usual time, but instead kept getting worse and worse. It was as if a well had been tapped that was dammed up for a long time. It would not exhaust itself. The inflammation of my skin was horrendous. My whole body was swollen so that I could hardly move my feet and hands.

All the energy was in the skin and the body. I was feverish in one moment and suffered from cold the next. I became hopelessly depressed and exhausted and was soon unable to work at my job. At the same time I started to notice my eyesight getting very blurry and out of focus. I was diagnosed with cataracts in both eyes which are known to happen to about eight percent of people with AD. I was very scared and seriously thought I was going to get blind.

I was sent to a special clinic where they would cleanse my system with special diets. I was treated with homoeopathy, massages and special baths. I slept all day and was up all night.

During that time, I started to paint and contemplate a change of career. Until then I had been working as a kindergarten teacher. I could hardly stand the idea of going back and being surrounded by a big group of lively children. The mere thought of it made me feel like being in a bee hive. My body felt as if I was a bee hive myself. It was a nightmare. After my hospital stay I went back to work for a couple of weeks until I collapsed for good.

I stayed home for months. I meditated, practised yoga, followed special diets and read any article I could find on possible cures for skin disease. Nothing helped much. My skin got as hard as a shell and cracked open all over my body. I was in constant irritation, pain and exhaustion.

My physical condition seriously impacted the relationship with my partner. I could hardly stand to be touched by him anymore. I also felt that he didn't want to touch me, which started to make me feel repulsive, ugly and not lovable. Due to my insomnia, constant fidgeting and scratching, we decided to sleep in separate rooms. I was so scared to see my whole world collapse.

I felt that I was in uncharted waters and didn't really have a clue how to deal with a situation where everything falls to pieces and one has hardly enough energy to get up in the morning.

I then started to see first a Jungian analyst and then I met Dr. Max Schupbach who was my life saver in this crisis. I think for the first time in my life I felt understood for who I was and what I needed help with.

John, my partner at the time, was my first true love. We met in Ireland in 1974 where I was studying English for six months. I fell in love with him very quickly and we soon moved in together. After I went back to Switzerland to finish my schooling, we visited for about three years, going back and forth. We had great times travelling together. Later we lived in Zurich and got married. My illness crisis started about a year and a half after that. After I got back from the hospital, I had to give up my job, which was a real blow to my self-esteem and created a lot of existential fears in me. So far, I had financially supported both of us. At this point, John could no longer continue to only focus on his painting. He had to go and earn money, since I was no longer able to do so because of my physical condition. I felt guilty for being sick and needing his support. I also felt bad for not being able to support him anymore in his creative endeavours.

My skin demanded attention and became a very real third entity to be considered. Up to this point, we had been very nice with each other and hardly ever fought. All of a sudden, the whole relationship process broke out, became more overt, and we started to have horrendous fights. I became more aware of his unrelatedness and felt really hurt by it. I finally realized that he was only related to himself and saw my getting sick as a nuisance and hindrance to his own creative development. Looking back, I see my skin process as a teacher and ally in relationship. My skin forced me to become more sensitive with myself and to become more aware of relationship signals that hurt me.

John and I separated in 1983. He moved back to Ireland, and we only had little contact over the past years. I called him in April 1994 because I wanted to hear what he thought about the role of my physical condition in our relationship. Interviewing John triggered a lot of emotions in me.

It was very painful to experience how unfree I felt in the atmosphere we created together. Yet, it also created the necessary tension and dissatisfaction inside of me I needed on my path of growth and healing. Revisiting and writing about this relationship which was part of a real crisis period in my life on all levels, -- physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually, -- is a way to value my experiences and to give them the necessary credence in myself.

## **6.2 Interview with John: May 1994**

The following is the tape-recorded phone conversation, interspersed with my reactions to his comments.

Silvia: Do you remember what kind of feelings you had when we started our relationship? We got close very quickly.

John: Yeah... I was very threatened .. because I'd never shared space with anyone before. I was very threatened.

Silvia: Mhhmm... Mhmm

(OUCH! How painful to hear that he only remembers being threatened by the relationship, rather than being in love with me! I was head over heel in love with him at the time. Even now, years later, it is painful to me to hear this. It reconstitutes feelings of rejection that I must have somewhere deep inside me.)

John: I think the first few weeks were very wobbly.. But having got through that, it all changed around.. I was able to trust my life in somebody else's hand, which had always been a difficult thing for me to do... And then it was wonderful...

Silvia: Do you remember the first time you noticed that I had a skin disease?

John: Ahh.. I forget.. The asthma was the first thing I noticed. I remember you using your inhaler a lot in those days. I am trying to answer about your skin.. What I can remember is walking down to the sea at Coolmain (the name of the house we lived in a year after we got together) and getting buckets of salt water for you to bathe in...

But if you mean in terms of being repulsed or something with your skin.. I never felt revulsion..

Silvia: Mhhmm.. You must remember touching my skin and noticing ....

John: I mean ..I remember later when we lived in Zurich and you were really sick... It's only in those times that it was an area of difficulty.

(Of course, this is just what I think. He really was put off. I remember him saying it, too, on several occasions towards the end of our relationship. He said that my skin was not nice to touch because it was not soft and smooth, which was certainly true, but painful to hear. I felt pushed away. Now I think that my rough skin had a message I might have used in the relationship. I could have been a bit more rough towards the outside. I could have been more rough and earthy with him, which would have been a protection of my feelings.)

Silvia: How was that.. for you?

John: It was difficult in that our two processes were getting entangled. I was attempting to get more in touch with my sexuality but from you there was a barrier. The skin is a very sensual thing ..

(I remember how often I felt pushed back by John, way before I got really sick. I remember crying about not really feeling connected with him. This happened right in the beginning of our living together. We didn't have much sexual contact. I remember talking and crying about it and then starting to feel unattractive and rejected. Although I have had problems with my skin for all my life, I connect feelings of shame and complexes around my skin condition with this period in my life. Before, my skin problem had been something that I just handled and lived with. I was treated with cortisone which suppressed the worst outbreaks.

Most of the times, it was not very visible and would disappear as soon as I spent some time in the sun.

With this relationship, though, I started to feel that I had something to be ashamed of and that made me feel repulsive to other people. I started to wear long sleeves and cover my face with make up.)

Silvia: There was a barrier....?

John: Yeah, you were lying in bed covered with cream. And, you know, I had the most immense compassion for you and your sufferings. For whatever reason, it seemed that our processes were being forced apart. My process was actually being blocked when I wanted desperately to open up. I felt so caught.

Silvia: Did you feel pushed away, pushed back or something?

John: No, blocked. I was reaching forward, but being blocked. It was definitely something that came between us. I felt that I couldn't hold you, I couldn't really be near you.

(I wonder if he really wanted to reach out to me. I mostly felt his resistance.)

Silvia: Hmmm... you mentioned repulsion before.

John: I've never felt ... I don't know .. I never felt repulsed.

Silvia: No? (I don't believe him.)

John: It's interesting, because my father, as you know, has psoriasis ..We talked a little in recent times and I got to know more about it. He developed his psoriasis after two years of marriage. I am sure it had to do with his stress about living with people. He is a very shy person.

My father never really showed his psoriasis to me. So it wasn't exactly that it caused me any particular distress.

Silvia: I remember that you told me that you were shocked that I had something like your father had, whom you never liked much...

John: Well, that is how life goes. I think if I had to invent someone to fall in love with, it would not be someone with a skin ailment. It was like a paradox. It's possible that we actually unconsciously chose each other as part of our process..

Silvia: right...

(Ouch, that hurts. My suspicion is confirmed. I am hurt and angry about what he says.)

John: I felt taken aback when I first discovered that you had asthma and a skin ailment. I felt taken aback, but I felt too much love and affection for you. Well it was this thing that I would have avoided...

Silvia: Right ... You must have not liked it very much..

John: Well apparently it didn't bother me too much, because, as I say, I was very happy being with you. But as things carried on, it got difficult.. It was all a learning process for me... Also when we first knew each other - I had not lived with anyone for a while and was a very private person in many ways. Your moving in with me .. that was a big challenge for me..

Silvia: You said before.. that my skin was like a barrier.. Can you make a picture out of it?

John: Yes. It is a wooden fence around a field.. As I say that an image comes back to mind, a dream I had about a year ago. In the dream I crossed a ditch with a fence on the other side and there was a bridge across. It was a crossing between civilization and red Indian country..

Silvia: That's interesting that you say red Indian country. My skin is so red.. There is a barrier to a more "native" way of life..

(This "native" or nature connected way of being was missing in our relationship. We were too "civilised" and unconnected from naturally following our own impulses and feelings with each other.)

Could you look back in time and see me how I looked when my skin was really bad? Can you imagine that there was a spirit inside of me and what that spirit wanted to express through me?

John: Ahhm... anger. I see a native American Indian doing a war dance..

Silvia: A war dance?

John: Yes.. waving his tomahawk,.. dancing,... dancing around the fire... Flames..  
He is dancing around.

(As John talks about a native American Indian I remember a inner work of mine that I had a few months ago and which I have recorded in my journal:

My skin is very troublesome today. My face is inflamed and hot. I look in the mirror and see a native American Indian with a serious and centered face. He is in a trance - dancing ceremony. I don't know much about native American culture but I start dancing in my apartment - dancing and singing and beating a rhythm. I dance around wildly seeing a desert landscape in my inner vision. I feel the heat and the ruggedness of the land and the spirit of the Indian chief.

I dance for a long time and get into a real trance which helps me to connect with my own spirit again. )

Silvia: Flames, fire, dancing. What kind of war dance is it and for whom or against whom?

John: I think there was a lot you didn't express. I used to think that we had a very honest relationship. But in terms of dealing with each other, we really were too busy being nice to each other...

Silvia: That is very true.. I didn't dare or know how to bring up difficulties and express negative feelings. You gave me strong signals that it wasn't o.k. to go against your opinions. Looking back to that time, I see that I was in love with you and gave up a lot of my own individuality to adapt and to fulfill your needs and have a relationship with you where you felt comfortable. My skin reacted, though. I then felt guilty and shameful for having a problem and did not know what to do with it. I felt very caged in.

John: Aha.. sorry..

Silvia: If you looked at my skin, at the texture of it, the colour of it, the structure, what in nature would it remind you of?

John: Lichen that grows on a tree, or coral. ... coarse

Silvia: Coral? (surprised) ha..

(I hear the pain in my voice. I feel so criticized for not having a "normal" smooth skin. It feeds my self hatred and judgementalness about my appearance. Especially as a woman I suffer from the stigma of not having a beautiful skin. My skin is rough and red and inflamed and people ask questions or look at you. I used to be very self conscious and embarrassed about that. It is hard in everyday life to follow nature and become a piece of coral instead of getting into a victim state and feel criticized.)

John: Yes ...

(As I am writing this a memory comes up: Descriptions of my skin:

I see a dried out field. Desert landscape.

I remember years ago being at a photography exhibition. One artist had taken photographs of earth - cracked open earth - fields - dried out earth with huge cracks. It looked very fascinating wild and beautiful. I remember that I was fascinated to look at the pictures. At the same time I hardly dared to stand close to the photographs because I thought that someone would make a remark about the similarity of my skin and these pictures. The pictures were taken in the desert of Iran. I was too shy to ask the artist about the pictures but ever since then I have closely looked out for pictures of nature with strong structural design - rugged nature. I was fascinated by the salt crustations at the Dead Sea - often looking similar to the skin of people with skin diseases that come there to find healing. I am fascinated by snow crusts - wild stormy skies - barks of trees - fiery sunsets - wildness - the desert.)

Silvia: It was a hard time, when we were together and I was so sick ...

John: There were great times..

Silvia: Before I got sick, we had some great times. But when I was so sick, I suffered so much. I really went to the bottom.

John: My god, yeah.. I HAD to separate from that.. from going down with you... I had to get in touch with my process.. I had to get out of Zurich..

Silvia: (Ouch!) That was tough.. That was very difficult for me that you left me when I was so sick...

(A memory surfaces: I am lying in bed feeling so guilty to be so useless and helpless. I say to John: "I think you should leave me. I'm useless, I am a mess. I am no fun to be around. Why don't you leave me?" In the background I hope that he would convey his unconditional love for me and say: "I will never leave you. Now is the time when I will take care of you and go to work. You just stay at home and take some time out to nurture your creativity. You have been my muse for the last years, now it is my turn to be yours." Unfortunately I didn't know how to bring out my needs. His hesitant answer was: "Well, I cannot leave you in this situation. How could I?" - He could. Not much later, he opened himself up to me and said that he didn't want to financially support me anymore. He could not stand to live in this city, this country anymore and needed to go back to Ireland. That was in spring 1981. I was destroyed. I was angry and hurt when he left. I was scared, but somehow relieved, too. Finally it was clear. I had to get my life together and make some changes.

I had the following dream around this time: John and I had a garden. We were looking at what had grown to harvest. There were some green peppers we uncovered from under the earth. I saw that they were rotten. I was shocked, he was kind of indifferent. I then went to a different area in the garden and saw that the seeds that were planted there not long ago had already made little tender shoots that peeped through the earth. They looked juicy and freshly green.

The relationship fruits were rotten by this time. The chili peppers represent the hot spice in the relationship which I was missing so much. We acted more like an old stuffy couple than the young, dynamic and spontaneous individuals we really were. Those parts of us could come out during our travels together. In everyday life, they were buried under the earth and did not get the sunshine, the warmth and the attention they needed in order to grow. I was shocked to realize how much I had neglected these parts of myself. In the dream I go to another space in the garden where there were some greener sprouts. There was hope for a new life.)

John: Well..

Silvia: The whole process was very painful at the time and I also learned so much from it. Nevertheless, it was a very painful experience for me to be left in the situation I was in..

John: It is unforgivable.

Silvia: Well, I DO still have a lot of very very hurt feelings about it.. I can't deny that.

(I am crying as I am writing this down. I still feel the pain of that time.)

John: Me, too. I try not to be too hard on myself. I always think that we need to try to work with what we've got.... But you know, Zurich was the worst place for me. I had to go. I was cleaned out. I had nothing left to give..

(I was dreaming of relationship and he was focused only on himself. This is what I should have done more! I should have followed myself more at that time. I should have been more independent in following my impulses and challenged him more often.)

Silvia: It was really scary for me. I had just lost my job which was both our financial support. I was sick in bed or in the hospital. I was really down in the dumps. You then said that this situation was not good for you and you wanted to leave. You didn't want to support me financially because the job you eventually got was not satisfying you. And now you say that Zurich was not a good place for you anymore. What about me? I could not just leave! I am furious with you for having left me in that difficult situation.

John: I really don't know. It just appalls me. I hate myself for having done that... I absolutely hate myself because of that.

Silvia: It was a bad scene... I don't want to make you hate yourself, but I need a reaction from you - otherwise I feel crazy.

John: Oh.. my god...sorry..

Silvia: Well, I guess we each had to go our ways... It was a learning process...

### **6.2.1 Comments:**

Listening to the tape I hear my voice being a little distant and shielded. I was protecting myself from getting hurt again. I see the emotional barrier happening here. I hear John's voice and his evasiveness which reconstellates all my past hurt and anger now. I get furious and have all my reactions once again. I experienced similar reactions when my father left and I felt so deeply angry and hurt.

I obviously still have some emotional work to do in this area although I thought I had cleared a lot. It is embarrassing to me to admit what a big emotional wound I still have. I also want to mention how quickly and deeply one can get drawn again into the same relationship field again - even though decades have passed.

Looking back to the relationship with John I see my skin symptom as a inflammation of our distanced behavior with each other. We each needed to be more independent in following our feelings and emotions within the relationship. The more fiery and expressive side was missing.

Personally, my itchy and bothersome skin showed me that I needed to relate more to myself and my own impulses and follow my dreams rather than focus so much on John's needs and expectations.

I downsized my own dreams of being free and independent for the sake of a conventional idea of relationship. I remember very well how scary it was when I would once in a while fantasize living alone. I would be much more independent and spontaneous. I would have more of a social life and have more friends. But most importantly, I would follow my impulses more freely. This fantasy was very different from my daily reality at the time.

For both of our spirits the life we were leading was too settled and conventional. We had lived more independence and impulsiveness in the relationship before we moved in together.

My nature tickled, itched and fired me up to wake up about that.

I remember a strong dream I had about that time:

Sitting at a little coffee table outside my grand mother's little vacation house in Italy. I suddenly look up and see a huge thick snake draped along the house from the bathroom to the kitchen. I don't see the head of the animal. Being scared of snakes in general I get up and look for something to kill the snake.

I was not in contact with the unpredictable snake energy. I was scared of it and preferred attacking and repressing it in me.

I see the snake as a symbol of creativity and powerful transformation. The snake being draped from the bathroom to the kitchen makes me think of an alchemical process, the prima material being found in the bathroom and getting cooked in the kitchen. The dream happens in San Bartolomeo, which is a very quiet and powerful spot overlooking the Lago Maggiore and is a place that heals my soul. It is in Italy - a culture that supports emotional expression and passion.

The combination of introvertedness and the Italian spirit is the attitude with which my transformation and healing might happen.

In my own psychology John represented a part that I didn't live much at this time. He was freer in following his own rhythms and living his creative side.

He lived an aspect of me, the creatively involved and self absorbed part in me, with which I was not sufficiently in contact with yet. I needed more time to focus on myself and to develop my own individuality, rather than putting all my focus and energy into a relationship. Shortly after John left me, I picked up my studies.

I imagine the spirit of this relationship was one of being independent and focusing more on the individual. Both of us were un-free to really live our individualities within the relationship. Without any good role models, we tried to fit the conventional ideas of what intimate relationships and marriage are about. We primarily focused on establishing a harmonious togetherness and tried to keep trouble, distance and independence out of it. John's signals of un-relatedness, as hurtful as they were to me at the time, really indicated the way to go for both of us.

My skin reacted to the double signals of the intended relatedness and the unintended un-relatedness. Being independent and unrelated was very threatening to me. As a young teenager I had suffered from my father leaving us. He followed his impulses without caring for the whole of the family. The experience with John was similar. I felt hurt by his un-relatedness and reminded of the scene with my father.

It was one of the best and painful teachings - one of the greatest gifts for my development. My nature pushed me to develop into a new identity and leave the old pattern of following other people's needs rather than my own impulses and my free spirit.

## **7. CHAPTER 7**

### ***7.1 Relationship struggles - The Fire outside***

I met Ben in 1984. I liked his sense of humor. I was ambivalent about getting into a new relationship. I had just ended my relationship with John a year before and was still dealing with the pain of having been left.

The relationship with Ben was difficult; we fought a lot right from the beginning. Our different attitudes towards life polarized us strongly and our fights were intense. In one way, it was a relief to express anger in relationship and fight instead of mostly experiencing the fighting internally. In this relationship, I was very focused on myself and my creativity or studies, whereas in my previous relationship my partner John had occupied that role.

I tried to integrate my missing father pattern by going back to school and studying for my matura exam (the Swiss equivalent of a BA in foreign languages). I had a goal in mind that I was going to reach, no matter what. I had hoped that I could motivate Ben to do something similar with his education since I knew that he was depressed around his educational background. He had dropped out of college just before graduation. I had a dream that we could be companions on this path of educational development.

My support was inspiring to him to a certain point, but then constellated his feelings of hopelessness and resistance. He was jealous of all the things I was busy with and interested in. I had a job, was intensely studying for my matura and became more involved with Process Work. All of my activities were threats to him and to our relationship, which was very accurate. Since he did not get involved with anything I was interested in, I felt like I had affairs with Process Work and with my studies. This caused a lot of relationship problems and we fought a lot. Ben had a latent drinking problem which re-emerged and caused a lot of fights in the relationship, too.

During all this time I was furiously wrestling with my skin symptoms. I physically withdrew from Ben because of our relationship problems. I couldn't stand physical closeness. I was nervous and electric. My skin would flare up when we had unresolved fights and when I was stressed.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I decided to interview Ben about his perspective on our relationship and my body symptoms.

### ***7.2 Interview with Ben: April 1994***

Silvia: When did you notice that I had an atopic dermatitis?

Ben: The first night.. You told me.. I wouldn't have noticed. I even remember the sentence you said: I have a skin disease, but don't worry it is not contagious..

Silvia: Yes.. I remember, I was nervous about it. I thought I'd rather tell you right away. It was less painful to me to deal with a possible rejection right away.

Ben: It never disturbed me. I wanted to be with you. I often felt sorry for you when I later saw how much you suffered from and were disturbed by your health.

Silvia: It never disturbed you?

Ben: No it didn't.

Silvia: I remember now, I could hardly believe it... I couldn't accept it myself.. I always thought that it would be so repulsive for someone else.. because I was repulsed..

Do you think it was an issue when we touched? I often felt really electric and could hardly be touched..

(I am sad to read this now and see how my self-hatred creates distance. Throughout the interviews I heard that I create barriers and distance and I realize how my not accepting myself for who I am creates relationship difficulties. In a way I am constantly dreaming that nobody likes me, while at the same time searching for the magic that will finally break this spell and love me unconditionally. If someone loves me, I reject the person because I don't believe them.)

Ben: Yes. You were often at a distance. I would have liked more body contact.. I felt rejected. Sometimes when you were really sick you were very distanced. I had the sense that you would have preferred to be alone. You didn't want to be with people. You isolated yourself.... separated yourself from outside life.. I think that you used your skin problem for making distance in relationships. I felt something like that.. You were also very nervous and aggressive then.

Silvia: Yes, I remember. I felt irritated and everything was too much for me.

(Ben needed support and contact which I tried to give him. But I needed so much support myself in my endeavors. He was envious of what I was doing though and could not support me. This again made me distance myself and detach from the relationship. He was right I was using my health to make a distance although we had many discussions about this dynamic too.

Ben supported me financially in following my dreams; he paid for some of my courses and books. He admired what I did and was jealous of not being able to do the same thing. He saw how we were growing further and further apart. He panicked and started to escape into drinking. This created a lot of fights between us.)

Ben: That's when we had our biggest fights. I felt pushed away. You were so busy with all the things you did. Your maturation studies, your job, the courses you attended, the meetings. I felt left out. You were often tense about going to seminars. You were nervous about your studies. Your skin got worse in those times. I thought that maybe all this stuff was not so good for you since it caused you so much tension. You were so consumed with all the things you were doing. And the rest of the time which you could have spent with me, you rejected me.. I got angry and aggressive. I had temper tantrums. In the end, you had no time for me anymore.. I felt so rejected and hurt..

Silvia: I know you did. I understand that you felt bad. I am sorry. I was very self involved.. that was hard. I wanted you to share my life. I wanted you to be interested in Process Work, too. You just always fought me. Your stubbornness hurt me.

Ben: I know I was stubborn, that is true. I was challenged too much. I felt too pushed. I was never enough. You did much more than me. I could not keep up with you. so I fought against you... true..

Silvia: I know you have an active fantasy life. Could you make a fantasy out of what my skin looked when it was really bad? Is there anything in nature that it reminds you of?

Ben: Ha.. there is fungus, a mushroom that looks like this .. it is red and has white specks.. a big toadstool.

Silvia: This is fascinating. A few days ago, I dreamed that mushrooms grew out of my thighs.. I make that comparison a lot too..

(Mushrooms - especially hallucinogenic ones - are widely used by shamans, healers and witches. Their magic powers are known in many cultures to transport a person into lands of different dimensions and perceptions. (Bauer, 1980).

Silvia: Imagine looking at me with this mushroom skin. Imagine now that in this skin lives a spirit or a being that wants to express itself.. what is it?

Ben: I am trying to see it visually. It is like a fire from within that is trying to come out.

Silvia: A fire..? Imagine that fire is expressing itself freely.

Ben: Then you would burn away.. Explode. You were explosive in those days. A darting flame or a flash..

Silvia: (laughs) Yes.. I know. Could you make a figure out of this darting flame? Imagine a children's story .. a fairy tale. Imagine a figure who had the nature of a darting flame.

Ben: Well, the devil always came like a darting flame or a flash out of hell. In Belgium there is a brand of a household machine that has a blood-red devil in a flame as its brand picture. He is actually the flame.

Silvia: Can you imagine the devil in our relationship?

Ben: Well that is what you were! (laughs) That is very accurate.. That wasn't so difficult to imagine.. (both crack up laughing). You were the more impulsive and energetic force in our relationship and you were the motor for change.. I think the more energy you had the lamer I got..

(We were very polarized. I used my fire in a more active way by pursuing my studies. Although I suppressed other parts in me like the more leisurly ones that he represented. What I missed in my prior relationship with John, I lived in this relationship. I had the reversed role now. I was really into focusing on studying and would have loved Ben to share this with me. Since he could not do that I had to focus on my own undertakings which cost me a lot of energy and creativity to pursue them.)

Ben: I was not ready to pick up the fire. I think it would have burned me. I only suffered from the challenges and changes and got burned. The fire was too hot. If I continue the fantasy, you were the fire and I was a giant tortoise with a huge shield, protecting myself against the fire.. I hid under the shield until the attack was gone.

(I am sad that he wanted to protect himself against the fire, his own creativity and my encouragement. It was difficult for me to support him but at the same time being seen as a threat and an enemy.)

Silvia: Yes.. this is really fascinating.. you were a Tortoise and I was a devil with fire..who can't really come out so good..that is a difficult dynamic. I had the same dynamic internally too. I could not really live all the energy of the fire either. It came out then in our relationship fights.

Ben: Impossible..

Silvia: Do you see a similarity in my skin symptom and your drinking problem?

Ben: Yes absolutely.. Both of our symptoms have to do with an inner force. With you it comes out of the skin. With me it comes out in nervousness and anxiousness - I am very afraid of my energy, and try to extinguish it.. the fire. ....we both have a fire! You can deal better with it and I try to calm it down. To let the fire burn would be dangerous.

I am afraid to even think in that direction. I would burn up in it.

Silvia: I saw a lot of creativity and fire in you. I was attracted to that in you. I would have loved you to live it more.. let it out..

(I am sad about his not being able to believe in his dreams and talents.)

Ben: Yes. I know .. I felt pushed and got scared and then put on my shield.... I think that fire represents itself as fear...fear and guilt and all kinds of negative feelings.. I want to push them far away...if it then hurts and burns me too much I try to put it out with beer..

Silvia: And now could you make a fairy tale or a cartoon out of our relationship?

Ben: (very promptly) Yes. Hagar the terrible. The viking who only eats, drinks and hunts. He is on a march somewhere in the wilderness with a bunch of barbarians. He has this little cute dog too.. - that's a funny cartoon. He is always up to something and carries a keg of beer or a keg of schnaps.

He has a wife who is huge and always cooks for him and beats him up with the cooking spoon once in a while. - You didn't beat me up physically.. you just beat me up with words..

(both laugh).

Silvia: What a relationship myth! (both crack up laughing)

### **7.2.1. Comments:**

In this relationship I had more access to following my spirit. I had a lot of support in my therapy my friends from Process Work who helped me see that.

I had the same struggle within as well as outside with Ben. I tried to support him in leaving his family pattern of being depressed about not having lived one's dreams.

We had similar inner dynamics of having on the one hand a fiery part and on the other hand a detached and laid back part. Since I was mostly into pushing things along Ben got polarized on the other end of the scale.

Thank god we shared a sense of humour and detachment that would often relieve the tension.

The unpredictable energy of my witch eventually pulled me away from this relationship and pushed me to focus on myself even more. I moved to the States in 1990 to pursue my studies in Process Work.

## CHAPTER 8

### PART 3 THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF MY SYMPTOMS

#### *8.1 Introduction*

I use journal entries and therapy sessions to show how the pattern of my process happens internally as well as externally and appears on different levels.

Living my life is an on-going well of experiences in dealing with chronic symptoms. This intense self-investigation, talks with friends and especially the conversations with my long-term therapist, Max Schupbach, have helped me understand the long-term aspects of my illness and how the experience of my symptoms relate to my life-myth from a process-oriented viewpoint.

I want to stress here that all parts of the process are equally important; together they create my personal psychology and express best who I truly am. Although I might favor one part over another at a certain time in my life and feel more drawn towards developing a specific part of myself, in a life time, they all need to be worked on and brought out. I see my life process as an opportunity to become whole.

Knowing about the overall context of my skin disease and being familiar with my own long-term process, I often tend to have an idea of what a particular symptom means rather than keeping a “Beginner's Mind” and unfold the wealth of the actual immediate experience. The unpredictable and irrational appearance of my skin symptoms challenge my identity and tendency to rationalize things statically rather than entering the stream of experience and follow process of the moment.

The self-analysis has proven difficult at times since I was the subject as well as the object of my investigation. The two sides were often represented by different internal parts which made it a very complex endeavor to have the overview of the process while sitting in the midst of the soup.

I recently understood that I often see my own process in a very linear way, criticize certain experiences and try to eliminate them. I tend to have too simplistic an idea of symptoms and use a causal approach for processing and integrating the symptom's energy. I therefore find myself applying a more newtonian paradigm to an irrational process.

It is more subtle than that. It is a constantly flowing dynamic. In this part of my dissertation I want to show how my body symptoms and the dynamic of the childhood dream interact and influence my life constantly.

A recent conversation with Max Schupbach made me understand again the subtlety of long-term chronic processes with symptoms and helped me see the dynamic of a process

as non-linear and holographic. Every aspect of a process can be accessed at any specific time. There is no space or time; there is just the momentary constellation.

In a therapy session that took place in 1980 in Switzerland, at the beginning of my involvement with Process Work, I become a fiery dancer as I process the experience of the skin symptom. Fifteen years later, I am still wrestling with a variation of this same dynamic; I still experience the fiery spirit caught in my body as I live with my personal, cultural, internal and external limitations, although, at this point in time, I have more access to living my free spirit.

I long for freedom, yet, at times, this free spirit (which also appears as a witch) has to be held down in order for the pattern to unfold and transform. For example, when I was studying for my matura exams I had to widely repress the witch in the actual studying; I had to be more or less one-pointed in order to meet my goal. I included her in the sense that within the framework of studying she was allowed to create an ever-changing creative study program during the four years. I - or the witch - kept finding new approaches to learn the material and make it fun and attractive to master the often boring and dry subjects like chemistry and mathematics.

My body symptoms express the same intrapsychic dynamic as my childhood dream; experiencing my itchy skin is intrinsically related to the witch dashing for the boy's penis or his potential. The witch is the energy of spontaneity and unpredictability; it goes against any "set ways" I establish in my life. This struggle is like an alchemical process where the vessel encloses the prima materia and the lid keeps in the heat. This lid is awareness. The witch has to be lived but also needs to go into the pot once in a while for the potential to be developed.

## CHAPTER 8

### 8.1.2 Wrestling with education (1981)

In my first therapy session Max Schupbach encouraged me to go back to school to keep my mind occupied. I had a big complex around studying that still bothers and hinders me today. Soon after that session I had the following dream:

I am wading through a dark swamp and eventually arrive at a large stone building that looks like the University of Zurich. In the basement some male students are working late at night doing research. One student takes me in and shows me a little room that becomes my laboratory. I am the only woman in the building.

This dream clearly told me to follow my therapist's advice and go back to school. In my family history women did not get much support to study and get a higher education. My aunt is still hurt and angry that her brother, my father, was the only one in the family granted the possibility to go to university and get a doctorate. Surely, the fact that she was a woman and my father was a man was very influential in that family decision. I empathize with her. I get furious when I see patriarchal attitudes deprive women of the opportunity and the support to become educated and independent people.

I went back to school to get my Matura which is roughly the equivalent of an American BA. It was a rough journey for me and my witch to find a way to study. I struggled constantly and needed to access all my creative resources in order to get to the actual study process. I created a study group, I enrolled in public courses, I hired tutors, I studied with TV educational programs and kept changing approaches fluidly. I could never keep a schedule for a long time. The witch would force me to stay creative and fluid, or else my attempts would be sabotaged and I'd get sick.

During my four years of study I also worked as a part time counselor in a day treatment program for elementary school children. I was in a difficult relationship with Ben and studied process work. All through this time my skin was bothering me incredibly and often made it difficult to concentrate and or even sit still. In my diary, I described my skin experiences in the following way:

### 8.1.3 Hell ride into the other world (1982)

I am sitting at my desk studying. I feel a slight itch. I try to ignore it and go back to the page I was reading. There is a crack in my skin. Like a door to another world - behind it, the glow from beyond.

"Come over," a voice whispers. "Come and dance with me. Itch with me."

"No!" I scream. "No way! I am reading. Don't distract me! I am scared of you. Go away! You are that fiery thing from the other world. You have lured me down there so many times. I know you want to eat me alive."

"You will not be able to resist me."

I get up to distract myself from feeling the itch. Just as I pull down my shirt sleeve, something from within grabs me and pulls me down. I wrestle for a second. It pulls me way down. I get a wild expression on my face as I enter the state of ecstatic scratching fury. I am taken by the roaring flames and spiral into a space where everything is seething fire and boiling magma. No more separateness. Time and space stand still. I hear the roaring of the immense flames; I feel the intensity of the heat; I am one with all of this fiery mass of magma. I am dancing with it. I am moving like it. I am it. The magma. The fire. I am its prisoner.

Seconds or light-years later, I don't know which, I surface again into the world. Injured, bloody and exhausted I lie on my bed and cry.

### **8.1.4 The fiery dancer (1981)**

I came into my therapy session today and felt just miserable. My skin is itching and hurts from all the scratching. I am feeling feverish and hot. I feel like my skin is one hot tight coat. It hurts when I move. I stayed in bed all day because I was so weak and exhausted and felt very depressed. I don't even have an appetite anymore and am constantly thinking: "When is this agony going to end? When can I lead a normal life again? How long do I have to suffer like this? What am I doing wrong? Where is the right medicine? Can't someone just take it away?" I feel like giving up every day, but always keep going. If only I keep going I will heal one day - this is my daily mantra. When? Soon. I hope. It is agonizing.

Max Schupbach asks me how I experience my skin. "Oh, it's really hot and itchy. It's really hot and radiates heat." I close my eyes and feel the heat radiating. Suddenly I see a body in flames. It is my body on fire. Max Schupbach encourages me to really see the flames and describe them in detail. As I describe the flames, I make some movements with my hands to show how they move and dance around. "Let's get up and move," Max suggests. We stand up and start to move. With my arms, hands and fingers and eventually my whole body I move like the flames and express the fire of my internal vision. I am moving wildly, almost ecstatically. I become a passionate fiery dancer. This is not a part of me I live much in daily life. Although I used to like to dance a lot, I am embarrassed now to dance so passionately. To move around wildly in a therapist's office is a different story from dancing in a disco! I tried to integrate this experience into my life the ways I knew. I danced around at home with loud music and started painting. As a result of this session, I also pushed myself over some inhibitions and went out dancing in night clubs again.

The process in my skin shows itself in different ways at different times. In the above example it was more the expressive impulsiveness and being fiery that was indicated.

The next session shows how at other times the "male potential" has to be developed and lived.

#### **4.1.4 The knight (1985)**

I remember working on my skin as it was very thick and hard. It was hurting me and actually inhibiting my movements at the flexures.

My therapist encouraged me to make some movements and I started to walk around slightly stiff, hardly bending my knees. As we amplified the stiffness of this movement I started to walk through the room in a peculiarly rigid and mechanical way. Suddenly I had the image of a knight in armour. He could not bend any of his limbs and walked in straight lines through the room. I did this for a while and enjoyed the simplicity of the movement. I started to count: "one.. two... three... one.. two.. three.."

I connected needing this attitude of being stiff and rigid to the way I had to pursue my studies at the moment. I had been creative until now and used different approaches of studying. Now was the time to just mechanically go straight ahead and make rigid strict schedules and cram. The process was in the experience of the skin inhibiting my movements.

Between the above described session and the following therapy session a few years passed. My life has changed in many ways: I finished my Matura exams, I separated from Ben, I left my job of five years and moved to the United States in spring of 1990. I am still struggling with my body symptoms although they have greatly improved and I can lead a normal life.

#### **4.1.4 The eagle over the Grand Canyon (1991)**

I begin this session in hopeless misery. "What am I doing wrong?" I complain. "I have been working on my itchy skin for so many years and I still have it. I am hopeless! I am angry and hopeless!" As I lament, I throw my hands up in the air. My therapist imitates me, and we both start stamping around the room, complaining. I amplify the movement some more and start moving around wildly. I am whirling around and around until I get really dizzy and suddenly stop and stand very still. Everything inside of me is still turning. I am thrown out of my usual way of perceiving the world. Way out there in this altered state I suddenly have a very clear picture of a huge eagle flying high up in the sky. It is flying in big circles over the Grand Canyon. I follow the movement of the eagle and spread out my arms. I can feel the air under my wings and I look down into the many canyons and rocky tops of the Grand Canyon. I am emotionally very touched by the feeling of freedom I experience as this eagle.

A couple of years ago, when I actually visited the Grand Canyon I had a similar experience. I yearn to be a free spirit and blend in with this awesome wild and rugged environment. I am incredibly attracted to the barren and rocky landscapes where the spirits fly free and there are no boundaries of human identity.

#### **4.1.5 Meditation on my skin (1993)**

I am suffering in my skin again. It hurts. The skin looks dry and red and it itches. I am miserable and depressed. I fantasize about hiding in a cave in the mountains to heal. Spending time in nature is always healing for me. It helps me detach from my personal level of suffering, comparing myself to other people or feeling judged by them. It connects me with my deepest spirit. In the face of nature nothing compares; there is just energy and the ever moving circle of life and death.

I go into nature in my mind and meditate on my skin. It resembles the rugged desert earth, cracked open by the dry heat. It also reminds me of a sunset. I remember the sky over the beach in Mexico; it looked like a huge romantic inflammation. This is what my skin looks like today. I immerse myself into that image and feel the heat of the evening sky in my body. I fantasize about taking off and flying into the deeply red and sensuous sunset, of being swallowed up by the fire and becoming one with it.

I AM one with it; I just forget about it most of the time. I am one with the desert earth, too. I am the sky that looks at times, with its thousands of tiny little clouds, like my skin

covered with a rash or little pimples. I am one with all of that, I often lose that experience when I am amongst people and get distracted by humans and their societal values and attitudes.

My experience of being one with nature is a philosophy that many shamanic tribes, native peoples and eastern philosophies share. In alchemy my experience would be an unus mundus experience; the Taoist would say that I was in the Tao with nature.

#### **4.1.6 Inner work (1993)**

I am preparing for my final exams in Process Work. My skin is going crazy and is really inflamed. I have a hard time focusing on anything. Since I can't successfully repress it, I decide to follow the experience of the symptom and unfold it.

For a moment I am scared to go on this journey into the unknown where reality starts to get warped, cloudy and out of shape. As I dive into the land of inner experience I have the following trip. I see dark tunnels and redness at the end of them. I go deep inside a tunnel, way down. For a moment everything turns into an intense color of dark red, and my perception becomes a mass of unfocused dizziness. Suddenly I see a very clear image of a woman going further and further inside the earth where she comes to a place of melting gold in the fire. Everything is melting and glowing. She reaches into the fire, grabs the gold and tears her chest open at the same time. She reaches to tear her heart out with a wild scream of ecstasy that echoes through the wilderness and out into space. The moment becomes a compression of time, space and knowledge!

"This is it!" I think as I feel the heat and fire moving through my body. Suddenly I don't feel it as an enemy anymore. I experience it as an invigorating and creative force that makes me excited and happy. I am in contact with my energy and living the moment. I remember a recent dream where I had to show a sun appreciation dance to my examiners. In the dream I was lying in the snow and the heat of the sun would pull me upwards. The dream shows the same energy, the heat, that needs to be experienced in a shamanic way.

The following journal entries are narrations of my experiences through my heightened skin sensations. They show ways that I reach ecstatic moments by going into the symptoms of my skin and unfolding them.

#### **4.1.7 Heat (1994)**

I love the heat of the desert. I walk in the desert in Australia: near Uluru (Ayres Rock). Beautiful, rugged, wild nature. Red earth. I have never seen red earth like this before. Of course, it reminds me of my skin. Red and rugged unkempt nature. I walk in the heat of the late morning. It is hot, almost too hot, just about bearable. I love to feel the heat of the sun on my bare arms, legs and shoulders. The heat is like a big hand grabbing my body.

The sun blasts onto my skin. It feels like my arms, my shoulders, my legs and my whole body are held by the strong, sensuous grasp of a lover. I am taken by a forceful embrace of ultimate sensual nature.

#### **4.1.8 Hot Showers (March 1995)**

I love to take hot showers. I stand under the hot shower forever. The hot water jets sting like little needles; they match the sensation of my itching skin being scratched. I stand under the shower and feel the intensity of the hot water streaming onto my body. It is an ecstatic altered state for me to I feel my body so intensely and deeply to the core of my being. This is me! The thought makes me shiver deep in the center of my being. Yes, this is me, the heat, the itch, the needles, the burning!

Then I change the water to ice cold. I love the sensation of icy cold water on the fiery hot skin. This is the cold mountain stream of the alps. It stings in a different way than the hot water. It is fresh, cold, crisp. Fire and ice.

Arnold Mindell relates itchy skin to spontaneous ideas that are disavowed. The following therapy session I had with Dr. Mindell shows how my spontaneity is not expressed and comes through in my skin symptoms. They point towards exaggeration and expression of emotions and fantasies.

#### **4.1.9 The Mushroom woman (1994)**

I tell Arny about my struggles with writing and expressing myself. He pats my knee and says that someone must have stepped on me and not loved me properly in the past. He says: "You are like a little ..." I interrupt and finish the sentence for him: "...Pilzli" (mushroom). I am absolutely stunned at the word that just dropped out of my mouth. It came out spontaneously and doesn't make much sense in an ordinary way. Arny says that I am a little mushroom that could grow and spread fast, that I could "mushroom."

This reminds me of my skin and the hives that pop out like mushrooms or behave like rising yeast. Arny suggests that I exaggerate all my emotions and ideas and make up wild and exaggerated stories. I tell him about my yearning to be manic and follow high flying ideas. His reply is: "You ARE manic. You just don't identify with it; it is all in the skin!"

The moment I get home I write a story about the mushroom woman:

The mushroom woman lives in the woods. She is old and wise. The spirit of the mushroom woman lays just beneath the surface of the forest earth. Her incredible net of connecting underground spores are like nerves in a body, under the skin of a person. She is vast and powerful. At the right moment she shoots out of the earth like no other plant. She spreads so fast, appears so unexpectedly that every time it's a surprise, a shock. Boom, there she is, in just a moment or a night. A sudden impulse, a thought, a dream,

and out pop mushrooms all over her body. They shoot out of her skin in no time. She wriggles and wriggles, until a message or a word, a dance, a song, a story or a dream come out of her. Sometimes she feels like shooting up into the sky as one huge mushroom, as big and tall as the Empire State Building. Her thoughts shoot up into the sky, higher and higher and then explode like fireworks into millions of sparkling, colorful particles of ecstasy.

#### **4.1.10 Itchy hands (January 1995)**

The following transcription of a therapy session shows the dynamic of the struggle between my more linear attitude, where I try to focus on a theme, and the spontaneous energy of the witch that sabotages this intention and creates a feeling in me of being caught by her and unfree to follow anything linear.

I work on my itchy hands. The symptoms are connected to my internalized family system in which I feel caught and keep myself bound as well in fear of what the new freedom would bring for me. The session shows the drama that is internally happening on all levels of my process. The radical spontaneity of the witch is inhibiting me to even work on my symptom.

This time the issue comes up in the area of my intellectual studies where I sabotage myself constantly. It is difficult to live the witch; her energy distracts and disperses my focus. To follow Max's intervention is perceived by the witch as a loss of freedom. She keeps escaping awareness.

I come into the session with the intent to work on my itchy eczema that is disturbing me lately. I often wake up scratching my hands in the morning. The inside of my right hand is red and inflamed.

Max: O.k. Lets go into it.. how do you experience the symptom?

Silvia: I am hopeless and feel caught in my own double bind of trying to work on myself but not being able to. I feel I have already tried every possible way, but all the alleys are blocked by my critic. Nothing works. I am hopelessly stuck.

(Each of the ways I have thought of, would involve a change of identity. I am at an edge in having the freedom to follow an intervention that would challenge this identity. I start to cry and feel like a hopeless victim. One side of me wants to get into the experience of the itch; the other side resists because it experiences the therapeutic intervention as a program. I feel hopelessly stuck in the middle of this interaction. The witch part won't cooperate; she only acts spontaneously and is against any consciousness, understanding or awareness. At this point, the witch is an inhibiting rather than a freeing force. She is cutting off my freedom to do anything linear, like follow an intervention. I am identified with the boy in my childhood dream in this instant.)

Silvia: I feel an inner fight that blocks every possibility of reaching any spark of awareness. It is crazy. I am in pain about that.

(Max encourages me lovingly to make a movement out of the itch that I am experiencing. He sees my suffering and wants to support me to leave my victim identity. I experience this encouragement as "being pushed" and react to it. I recognize an inner figure that is pushing and ordering me around, my father presumably. I rebel against that part and can therefore not follow an intervention which would liberate me. This internalized abuse scene keeps me prisoner within the system.)

Max: Let's make a movement out of the experience of the symptom.

Silvia: No! No way! I won't budge an inch! I'd rather die than make a movement!

(I surprise myself with the intensity of my "No!" Thank god the fight comes out and I have the reaction now. Behind this interaction is the story of the family dynamic with which I grew up and which I am not willing to leave: a dominating father who controlled everything and everybody. My mother and brother share the identity of being his victims. If I leave them now I feel that I will have abandoned them. My loyalty keeps me attached to my victim role. In my mind, leaving this role would mean to become like my father. I remember how he would put my brother down and I would defend him.

In this session the intention to work on my itchy hands brings up the whole internalized abuse scene of my childhood.)

Max: Well, maybe we have arrived at a dead end with your development. (He winks at me.) I see you can't do this. You won't be able to translate the itch in your hands into a movement. (He smiles at me and lets me know that he understands my dilemma and challenges me to try anyway.)

Silvia: I don't know what to do.. I am so caught in myself!

Max: Well, let's see... You are identified with being a hopeless victim, yet I have always seen you as a warrior woman who would take challenges... But maybe you can't go any further .. Maybe this is fate and you are stuck in the victim role... I think you can do it, though! - How do you experience the itch? What is the energy of the itch?

Silvia: The energy of the itch? It's sort of ... grrr (I growl and turn my hands into claws.) grrrrrrrrrrrr..... !!

Max: That's a good energy... Are you sure this is the energy of the itch and not the energy of the scratch...?

(The energy of the itch and the scratching are different. The itch is the sensation originally produced by the body; the scratching is a reaction to the itch. Process Work

sees the itch as the original experience which contains information that is less known or "secondary." The scratching is the reaction to this original experience and contains more known or "primary" information and is more patterned by the everyday identity. Max points this out to me to make sure that I go into the original sensory-grounded experience rather than into the reaction.)

Silvia: Right .. It is after I have scratched the hands already.

Max: How about the itch before you scratched? Imagine sleeping ... What kind of sensation would make you scratch in your sleep and produce these noises grrrr.. (imitates my growl)? Is it a tickling, or burning ... sensation..?

(I try to get in contact with my physical sensations. It is hard to do because the resistance is there again. I go into half a trance because of the inner fight.)

Silvia: This is so hard.. (I am embarrassed and blocked, and feel like complaining again.) I don't know!

Max: Just make any movements; we'll see which ones go along with your experience.. (He starts to move around making sounds; he intends to help me free myself from my inner fight and encourages me to get into the experience of my physical sensations.) Make some movements that are NOT the itch!

(This comment encourages me to go along with his intervention and addresses my resistance at the same time.)

Silvia: (giggles) NEVER!!

Max: O.k. this is what I've been hoping for... (Finally the internal fight comes out. In an organic role play Max takes over my internal pusher which I am fighting against.) You HAVE to!!! .... Now resist! You HAVE TO! (He winks at me and lets me know that he is playing a role. He then whispers to me:) Now we have to catch this whole thing.. Go for it..! (louder) I know .. Silvia I know you can do it ..

Silvia: NEVER! ...I'd rather DIE. Not even one little movement! Never in my life!

Max: Yes.. you would. Why is it so important for you to convince me that you cannot let go of the idea of being a victim, to the wicked witch who is putting a spell on you? You have to convince me that you'll never be able to get into the movement of the itch!

Silvia: (giggles) No way! Oh, god! (laughs) If I had to convince you about that, I would have to show you that I am smart!

Max: I see, yes... working on that will show that you might end up facing that you are smart or something..?

Silvia: Yes.

Max: There must be a story behind this. What is it? Let me guess... (winking at me) Someone put a magic spell onto you and depotentiated you .. It is straight out of a fairy tale: Someone cut off your potential.

Silvia: In the dream I saved the little boy. I dreamed that the witch wanted to cut the boy's penis off, but I dashed in between and saved him from the witch. This is my family history. My brother had a hard time in school and was put down a lot for not wanting to read books and study. I sided with him against my father and grandfather who gave him a hard time. Internally I am siding with that part too now. I can hardly dare to even follow an intervention because it is like following the father. I feel caught in between somewhere. It is also in my family history: My grandparents on my mother's side were communists and they educated themselves but didn't have a higher education. To have a higher education would mean to belong to the ruling class, so I somehow dare not do that. This is my constant inner fight. It is so incredibly strong. I don't want to identify with it, but it keeps me hypnotized all the time. It is painful. (I cry a little.)

Max: Wow, what a story! ... Would you like to change it?

Silvia: Yes!

Max: All right. Make a movement that is like the itch!

This is the moment of saying goodbye to your family background, to the communist ideas and to protecting the brother who had a hard time. You are now on your own. Make a movement that goes with the expression of your skin.

Silvia: (I throw my hands up in the air, irritated and as if I would throw something up in the air.) Off with this old shit! (I giggle with relief.) I am furious! I had enough! Off with it!

I keep throwing my arms up in the air. Then I start to make tearing movements at my back and whole body. I am trying to throw off the skin of my history, my personal history and my family history and become a free spirit. The itch of my hands is the energy that wakes me up in the morning and wants me to break out of this family pattern.

The witch has put a hypnotizing spell on me that prevents me from being aware, becoming an independent person and leaving the family background. I am often tired and frustrated about being caught in this inner fight. I wish I could just throw off this identity, this old skin.

The witch, which is a catalyst for my process appears as a jealous figure in this work.

#### **4.1.11 Rage and creativity (April 1995)**

As I got up this morning I felt a furious energy moving through my body. As I tried to find out what it was all about I got even more furious. In my fantasy I could only satisfy this rage by destroying something. Something just wanted to take over - a wild feeling of rage. It is scary to let myself go into a rage. What if I cannot stop? I tried everything to sublimate my anger. Nothing was satisfactory. At one sober moment as I tried to access the feeling of the anger in my body, I noticed that it was the same as what I usually feel in my itchy skin. Since nothing else helped I decided to go into the anger. I thought that I might just need to have the attack and go berserk. I might just need to let it out!

I did. In a fury I kicked the kitchen cupboards. I whacked the dishwasher shut so that three glasses splintered to pieces. I screamed at the top of my lungs. There was more. More and more! I threw plastic bags and bottles filled with water at the fence in the back yard. That was great! What a feeling to rage and go berserk! A holy rage. The berserkers were followers of Wotan who could, under trance, transform into bears and appear on the battle field to kill in a wild fury. They were often thought to be partly human and partly spirit like werewolves.

I too was transforming into a wild kind of being as I then took my painting gear to the back yard and started to throw paint in little plastic bags onto the huge cardboard that I used as canvas. What a pleasure! By accident I splashed paint over myself and destroyed my favorite T-shirt. Destruction! I remembered some hesitation I had this morning about wearing this favorite T-shirt. I ripped it from my body and threw it onto the canvas. It had to be included in the picture! Then I followed my irrational inspiration and went to the hardware store to get some big screws and nuts in order to screw the T-shirt to the canvas. I had been fascinated by these heavy metal nuts and bolts a few days prior as I got tools to fix the lawn mower. I screwed my T-shirt onto the canvas. As I stood back, panting, I suddenly saw the T-shirt as my skin lying there, crucified and bolted to the canvas. Part of my identity was bolted there, screwed on securely with big bolts. The crucifixion of an identity. This is the skin I need to throw off! Here it hangs!  
(I have included a photograph of this painting as the cover picture of part three)

The word berserk comes from beri = bear and serk = skin or shirt. I was happy to find this archetypal connection to the whole process: the blind berserk rage and throwing off my shirt which represents my skin and identity.

I was too limited in my everyday identity. The spontaneous spirit would not allow me to analyze and understand the rage at first, it wanted to live the energy of anger and frustration. My primary identity had grown too tight. The snake sheds it's skin when it becomes too tight and is therefore a symbol of rebirth. I shed my skin and made it into artwork. I followed my process by eventually going into the unknown of the rage. The accidental splashing of my shirt led the way. My identity needed more color. I created an irrational colorful piece of art and found momentary relief in living what was inside of me fully.



Max: (defending me) This woman has a great project. You just leave her alone and stop spooking her! The only thing that is stupid and boring around here is you!

Silvia: (I feel like the victim of the situation again.) I know! This is it. It is hopeless... I can't do it. (I start to cry and feel that I can't defend myself.)

Max: (meta-communicating about the process) There is a perpetrator and a victim and no defendant.

Silvia: Yes! damn!

Max: (jokingly and encouraging) Defense!!! Hey, where is the defense ? Leave her alone! Stop putting her down! She has only one problem and that is that she doesn't know how to defend herself against witches enough! But now she comes. She is getting her male power back and ..is attacking you!

Silvia: (I love it! I giggle with tears in my eyes. I get up and make cutting movements through the air.) Head off !!! Off with it! (I really get into the anger and start to yell and fight with the imaginary witch) Get the hell out of here! I never want to see you again! You were never ever any use for me, you stupid old witch! Off with your head! Off with it! Out of the door! (I open the door and push the imaginary witch out of the door, then quickly shut it again.) What a relief! But what will I do when she sneaks in again through the computer, .. through my brain? When she oozes out again and takes all my energy and my belief in myself?

Max: This is how you handle her. You whack her one, put her out of the door, and when she sneaks in through the computer, you watch out for her and whack her again. It is a twenty-four hours meditation for you. It is a shamanic awareness project. You have to keep your awareness all the time. It is your life myth.

In this session I was clearly the victim of the witch. The defense is missing. Someone needs to be awake all the time to watch out for the witch when she sneaks in and uses her subtle powers again. I need to match her unpredictable powers, otherwise she cuts my potential off. I need to learn from her. She is my opponent, my ally. I need to catch her and fight her in order to learn her mercurial powers. This is how I start to live them.

This time around the witch appeared as a disturbing and de-potentializing energy that needed to be cut off. The next piece of writing is a story that relates to my skin symptom and my world problems. Again, the witch appears as a dominant figure that takes away my power and puts me down internally.

#### 4.1.13 Dominatrix to the critic - fire in my hands (January 1995)

This morning I woke up with a jolt to the thought that I will be out of money very soon. I have to finish this dissertation, yet I won't be able to do so in time. I'll be bankrupt in no time! I have to make a living now.

I was in a miserable mood when I lay on the table at my acupuncturist's to get my regular treatment. When he asked me how I was doing, I broke out in tears.

"I'm miserable, I am depressed and I am stuck with my Ph.D. And look at my skin! It is really bad." I show him the inside of my hands where I have newly inflamed red spots. "They itch incredibly! I have to wear gloves at night. I couldn't even clean houses to earn money with these hands...."

I went on crying and complaining in a fit of self pity. Irv nodded compassionately as he went on feeling my pulses and gazing over the roofs of downtown Portland from his office on the tenth floor.

Suddenly he calls out: "I know what you can do, Silvia! I have the perfect job for you!"

"What is it?" I ask lamely.

"You market yourself as a dominatrix to those top salary earning business men. You dress up in some black leather gear, get yourself a whip and you're set. They pay top money to be ordered around."

For the second time today I sat up with a jolt. My mood was gone; my misery vanished. I squeaked with delight and cracked up laughing.

"That is the best idea ever! What a taboo to even think something like that! I love it; it is so nasty!"

Irv and I horsed around some more, whipping imaginary whips through the air and calling out to each other: "You are so bad! Nasty!" As we were ordering imaginary business men around the room. "Down! In the corner!"

I left the office healed. On my way home, in the car, I kept giggling and squealing with delight. Then in a moment of soberness I asked myself what was so appealing about the idea of being a dominatrix. I wondered where I had an internal dominatrix. It dawned on me that the roles reversed. I usually am the victim, the one who is getting whipped around by my internal dominatrix. Do I pay for it? Yes. In my internal drama the critic has the whip and puts me down and calls me names. I suffer, start to have allergies and need therapy and acupuncture treatments. Irv intuited this dynamic and got me out of my victim role. It is fun to be "nasty" and "bad" and use that energy that is usually coming towards me. I make some whipping movements with my hands and suddenly have a spark of insight. The itchy spots on my hands! The whip wants to come out of my hands! I play with this fantasy and whizz around some more: *Zzzzzzzzzz!* Down, you nasty critic! I'll whip you each time you put me down and tell me that I can't write! And

another whip for when you tell me that I am not worth anything! Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz! Let me write or I'll whip you into shape!

The energy of the dominatrix is the same as the one of the witch. The dominatrix orders the male around; this is very satisfactory and feels like fun. The element of sexism is coming up here. I have suffered from the patriarchal system in that as a woman intellectual pursuits were not much encouraged by my family background or the school system. Studying still is a difficult undertaking. To take the role against the patriarchal inner critic feels very satisfactory and fun.

The figure of the witch belongs to my life myth and has two sides to her with which I am constantly dealing. One time the energy of the witch is expressed as the reaction to an inner abuse of having been put down and unacknowledged by the patriarchal system; in other moments she becomes a freeing spirit. The latter aspect is shown in the next session.

#### **4.1.14 The mountain spirit (May 1995)**

I start the session with the intention to work on my money situation; I am almost broke and have no income. I think I need to work on my professional possibilities and career opportunities as a therapist.

Max asks me about a dream to see how nature would support me in making a decision. I tell him a dream that I had a few nights before.

I drive in a Land Rover up the Splügen pass. It is summer time and I drive up on a wide dirt road. At some point the road gets really narrow and winding. I stand at the foot of a mound and get hopeless. I think that I won't be able to get up there, the path is too curvy and narrow. But as I look at the ground I see that there are tracks in the dirt. Someone has driven up there already, so I will go there, too.

Splügen is the place where my grandparents lived and where I spent a lot of time as a child. It is the place where I was closest to nature. I describe to Max what the mountain looks like in reality. He asks me, if I had been up there. I tell him how I used to climb up there with my skis before they built the new ski lift. Max encourages me to go into the experience of being on that mountain top and look around.

I close my eyes and internally visit the place in the Swiss mountains. I see and describe the mountains around me. I describe how I feel: all alone, free and powerful. I feel the connection with nature, with the spirits of the mountains. I get all excited and feel passionately connected with the mountain spirits.

Max encourages me to be one of the mountain spirits and help Silvia make a decision about her professional life and her money situation. He gets up on a chair, playing me. I play the mountain spirit. I start to make swishing movements towards him, imitating the

sounds "shshshshsh." As the mountain spirit I am zapping energy towards him. I encourage him to fly with me, high up in the mountains: "Play with me! Come and fly up there over the top with me; don't care so much about society and social adaptations!"

Max, as me, responds: "I don't have time for playing and flying with you, spirit. I have to make it in the world; I have to start earning money; I have to get professionally ahead!" The spirit gets all excited and says: "Don't worry so much about all these social things. You feel much more empowered and free when you are in contact with me. If you live like this, you have made it in the world!"

"This is scary. What if I die?" says Max.

The spirit answers: "Then you die, but at least you had some fun; you had a good life. You should live as if you were dead, I mean, free. Being like free is like being dead; in living both you are free from social restrictions. Fly with me now, this is what you always wanted anyway: To be a free mountain spirit!"

The energy of my process is in the mountain spirit who is not interested in professional progress, building up a private practice or searching to make it in the world, although my money situation seems threatening at this time. Nature supports me in living my free spirit and in loosening up around money and social expectations.

This feeling of freedom reminds me of the day after my father's memorial service many years ago. I skied down that same hill, recklessly, and had the most incredible tumble. In my experience, I fell forever and ever. I sensed every instant of it: the smell of the snow, the wintery bright light of January, the cold, the reflection of the light on the snow my falling body kept stirring up as I thumped on the slope again and again, the repeated rattling of my skis over my head, the taste of the snow in my mouth, my breathing and - the stillness of the mountains. I was in a state of bliss and crystal clear awareness and wanted this tumble to go on forever. I sat down afterwards, deeply shaken and touched, thinking of my father who was a free spirit now. I was jealous of him; I wanted to be a free spirit too!

In the following case examples I will show how this free spirit shows itself in relationships. The Swiss culture I grew up in, as well as my personal edges are often not supportive of me bringing out feelings in relationship. The fiery spirit seems to show up in my skin instead; the itching is often meant to loosen up cultural and personal boundaries in relationships.

#### **4.1.15 Contactful wild friendship (1990)**

In a seminar of Arnold Mindell on Life Myth and Body Symptoms I volunteer for the demonstration of an exercise on body symptoms and relationships. He asks me to bring someone into the circle that I have a relationship with. I ask my friend Marie to join me. We chat a little about how much we like each other and enjoy being together.

Arny then wants to know how I experience my skin symptoms.

I tell him: "It itches and tickles and does not give me any peace. I constantly have to scratch .. It's really horrible!" Arny Mindell suggests a role play. He plays Silvia relating to Marie. My role is to be the spirit that gives me the itch. I have to find out what the spirit of the itch wants from me. Implicit in the idea of the symptom creator is that there is a message in the symptom that needs to come out more overtly.

In the role of the "itcher," I start to tickle Arny as he is talking to Marie. I tickle him on the back, under the sweater on his side, between his fingers, in his ears, on his feet, nose, all over. "Oh, oh no..." he keeps saying, squirming and twisting away from me.

I am giggling and having a great time tickling, pinching, poking and rubbing him all over. He asks me what the itcher wants to express verbally in this situation. As the "itcher" I say: "Hey, wake up, don't be so stiff...", and I start to move Arny's arms, turning him around. "Loosen up, come on, don't be so boring! You don't show all of your feeling for Marie! You are too stiff!"

I then step into my own role again and use this information of the "itch spirit" and grab Marie and we swing around and giggle and say: "You know that I really like you a lot, but I want us to be a lot wilder and fresher with each other. We are too tame with each other. Come on - lets have more fun!" We grab each other and I swing Marie around as we laugh and have a great time.

#### 4.1.16 The fiery spirit in the box (1994)

I come into the session with Arny and complain about all my symptoms that bug me and that I suffer from. I tell him that this is what I want to focus on in this session.

He hugs me and comforts me and we sit for a bit while he is making comforting noises and strokes my hair.

Arny: Let's say just for a moment that you couldn't have a body symptom - you couldn't even have a body. Let's imagine it wouldn't be allowed to have symptoms - what would you have to have? You can't have an itch or even a body that itches.

Silvia: (laughs) Oh.. yes...

Arny: And you can't have asthma and you can't have itches or sniffles - ..

Silvia: I see a picture as you talk : I see a fiery spirit in a box. It is caught in the box and it wants out...

Arny: You are a boxed in fiery spirit. O.k. Let's stay with this. (He plays the fiery spirit and starts to jump around and make some wild movements ) oops!.... oops!.....

Silvia: (Watches and calls out): Yesss... !!  
(claps her hands and laughs)

Arny: Be it! You're a fiery spirit! (Makes some swishing and fast movements) tshee .. tsceee shiuu...

Silvia: If I wasn't boxed in ? If I wasn't boxed in I would float on my back on a cloud (laughs)...I'd be playing around and just be free - this way the spirit would not be on fire though. The fact of being boxed in makes it fiery. It makes it angry and inflamed..

Arny: Should we just go up on the cloud - or should we find out what's boxing you in.. ?

Silvia: (laughs) Let's find out what's boxing it in.

Arny: I'll be just a spirit.. and you try to make a box around me .. (he starts moving around the room freely and moves his arms around and I take the role of being the one boxing him in.) Well..! I am a free spirit and I am going to play and float around and just have some fun...I'll go a little wild sometimes too..

Silvia: (Shakes her head and holds him tight) don't do that!

(Hugs him tightly around the shoulders and tries to stop him from moving around so freely..)

I am stopping you .. because...(lets go of the hug suddenly and moves back).

Arny: You got to an edge.. what happened?

Silvia: (Hugs him closely now.) No! don't move now! You can't go now! I am holding you tightly now!

Arny: Yes, this is it. You hold me so tightly - There is a smoocher in you. This is such a nice good hug.

Silvia: (Still hugging Arny) Mhh.. I am getting embarrassed now.. I am getting freaked out about this...

It takes me back to one of the first times I smooched around with a young man when I was about fifteen. It felt nice and smootchy to be close and feel each other's body warmth.

Arny: What's it feel like?

I'm sure.. there is a lot of sensuality in there (He holds my arm and shoulders).

Silvia: (I start to touch Arny on his shoulders and report what I feel) It's nice and strong. I feel your muscles on your back and shoulders..

Arny: Ah, you have a very intimate and sensual part in there that you like to keep boxed in. It is a very nice part. It likes to get to know people in a smootchy way and have body contact. It wants to know how people are made physically..

Silvia: (Giggles) I know but I can't do that - I can't just go up to someone and smooch up with them...

Arny: Well instead of you scratching yourself - you scratch or smooch with someone else. Fiery spirits don't really care - they just follow their impulses - they are not inhibited.. they just live what comes through them

Silvia: Oh boy! (makes a grimace )

Arny: (Laughs at the grimace) Now we are getting at the one who is boxing the fiery thing in. What was that?

Silvia: True, I am shy about body contact. I quickly get scared that things might get out of hand - something might get sensual or stuff.. you never know (giggles and sniffs)

Arny: The fiery spirit doesn't even think about it.. It gets turned on and off - it feels free with all the sensations that come and go. It's a feeling spirit...

Silvia: (Sniffs and blows her nose) Very edgy!

Arny: It's very interesting that while we were playing around, your allergic reactions were almost gone..

Silvia: I noticed.. (sniffs) - and now they are coming back.. !

Arny: Yeah - I just want to tell you that fiery spirit is good for you. You are a huggy person who needs a lot of smooching contact.

Silvia: Yes.... it's true...

Here the fiery spirit is in a box. Arny gives me the option to go right for the free spirit or to find out about who is boxing it in. The free spirit emerges in this work as a relationship spirit. It is free in body contact following its spontaneous impulses. At another time the process might have been to float freely on a cloud.

Once again my symptoms are trying to get noticed - once again I am not left in peace. I have learned though how to get into them more and use the energy in a more creative way. The symptoms have become more like a constant reminder and meditation through the day and I more often appreciate the enrichment of it rather than only experience them as a disturbance. Of course though I still wish every day that they would leave me in peace!

#### **4.1.16 Itching for life (1995)**

The inside of my hands are really itchy and break out a lot lately. This morning as I stood in waiting in line for my coffee, I was very aware of the itchiness of my hands.

As I took the paper cup with my morning latte off the counter I felt the heat of the hot drink through the surface of the paper cup. The heat amplified the itch on the inside of my hands. I took it as an opportunity for inner work today. I consciously felt the heat more. My right hand started to itch intensely. For a moment I almost wanted to let go of the cup to stop the itching. Wow - it was intense!

At the same time as liking this sensation it was scary. From the coffee cup - into my hands and then sensation of heat and jingling ran through my whole body. It was a very sensual feeling that now was streaming all through my body. I felt instantly connected with my inner magma and earthiness. I was sweating and feeling the intensity in my body. This is what I was not connected with before - energy - the primordial force of life and creation. I connected with my ecstatic inner forces and had a vision of the spirit flying high in the sky. I had the sense of being free of physical limitations for an instant. I suddenly was turned on by life! I had come to buy a cup of coffee in order to wake up and revive my spirits. I didn't need the coffee anymore. The experience of my itch gave me more energy than the coffee could have given me. I left the coffee latte standing on the table and walked out - revived.

With these personal works, I have shown how my constantly disturbing skin has, over time, become a helpful ally in my self development. It is accessible at any time and, when processed, connects me with a deeper energy in myself that is indicated by the witch in my childhood dream.

I want readers to have an experience of their own skin phenomena and therefore end this part of the paper with a Process-Oriented exercise that Arny Mindell helped me create.

#### **4. 2 Exercise on skin**

1) Do a body scan:

Look at your skin

Feel your skin

2) Notice what catches your attention:

What part of your skin is the weirdest?

(a bump, a dent, a roughness, a smoothness, a spot....?)

Do you see it ?

Do you feel it?

3) Amplify in the channel you perceive it:

Do you see it?

If you see it - make a picture out of it, draw it, paint it or just imagine it.

Make it bigger. Imagine your whole body being like the thing that caught your attention.

What is it? (Animal, stone, tree... sunset...)

Do you feel it?

If you feel it - feel it all over your body and make it stronger.

4) Unfold:

Try to feel into the phenomenon you see or feel

and try to become it by moving like it, sounding like it, feeling it stronger in your body, seeing it more clearly and intensely.

4) Who in your life is against it?

5) How could you use this in your life?

## 9. CONCLUSION

This personal study and self investigation of my process of living with chronic atopic dermatitis and its connection to my childhood dreams has been simultaneously a challenge and an inspiration for my further development. It shows how my body symptoms are the carriers of a spirit that urges my self development and continuous change.

I see this development happening on three levels: the internal, the interpersonal and on the social and world level.

On an internal level I see my symptoms as a push for freedom from my own limitations of my identity, the imprisonment of my own ideas about myself and the fear of exposing myself. By having written this PDE and taking my own impulses, ideas and opinions seriously I am exposing myself. I want to encourage myself and others with skin diseases and symptoms in general to talk about their ailments, the experiences and impact that they have on our lives, to ease the pain of loneliness and feelings of being an outsider. I also want to encourage people with AD and everybody else to LIVE the craziness that is locked in the skin; bring out the fight that is within you; be inflammatory and live the passion. Use creativity to express that inner fire; dance it; paint it; act it out ...

On a relationship and interpersonal level I see my body symptoms as forcing me to constantly give attention to my inner life, my arising impulses. My body symptoms are part of every relationship. They have interfered, demanded attention and stopped intimacy, sexuality and physicalness. The symptom stands for the missing element in a particular relationship. It is often a third party - I need to bring my symptoms and their energy into the relationship as an enrichment instead of being victimized by them. This is a challenging and big area of my ongoing personal growth that I am working on.

I am forced to live this irrational spirit and trust my own sensitivities and intuitions about relationship atmosphere. This ongoing shamanic meditation process forces me to re-create and invent ideas about relationships again and again. It makes me unpredictably independent in the way I relate to people and how I move in and out of relationship altogether. This driving force wants me to live an unconventional role for society which has cultural norms and conventional and limited attitudes about relationship and often disavows irrationality and independence. Conventional attitudes about relationships overrate long-term relationships and project security onto them. I think the only way to find security is to continuously follow one's own spirit whether that spirit creates relationship at the moment or not. My symptoms are teaching me over and over to do so.

On a social and world level my symptoms indicate exposing myself more. My body experiences show the way. The symptoms feel free to expose the fiery spirit in the red inflamed skin.

My cultural and family background have discouraged me in the display of fiery and wild expressions. I have compensated my visible marks with quiet and obedient behavior, since standing out in any way - especially as a girl - was not encouraged in my upbringing. I tried to suppress my emotions, ideas, phantasies, and creative impulses early on. This is still an ongoing battle within me. For women to stand out in any way - such as being single and pursuing academic studies rather than leading a conventional family life has not been encouraged strongly in my cultural and familial background.

People with body symptoms represent minorities within society and often are carriers of a unrepresented and unlived role for the larger field.

I see my symptoms as a calling to live a role for the time and culture I live in - it wants me to express fire, fun, wildness, creativity and women's strength and intuition.

This leads to another purpose of this study - the connection of my body symptoms with my early childhood dream, where this tendency is shown.

In the dream, I and a boy whom I am related to, are in the forest; a witch dashes for the boy's penis while I quickly move to his rescue.

I am siding with the "male" mainstream attitudes that are about to be cut off by an irrational and intuitive and shamanic force.

This irrational energy that is experienced in my symptoms and impulses wants to be lived and expressed. The witch is a timespirit that wants to be lived and expressed. The irrational needs to cut off the linear.

My every day identity however tends to be more adapted and mainstream - therefore the two forces are in a constant struggle. This struggle lies very deeply rooted in me and I try to uncover and deal with this tenaciously.

The spontaneity and unpredictable forces that are mirrored both in the dream and in the symptoms help me to get in contact with my own creativity that is underlying my process.

I think of creativity as a continual primal spark out of the chaos, a constantly new initiating life force and an ongoing process of renewal.

I see the constant shedding of skin as an indication for the creative process of renewal and rejuvenation of one's identity.

Creativity allows irrational and non - linear fluidity of expression. My itchy symptoms are sparks that force me to constantly re-create and invent new approaches to getting in touch with my underlying life energy.

I experience my symptoms primarily in two perceptive modes - proprioceptively and visually. Painting and creating visually are therefore ways of transforming my own

physical experiences, my own and others' perceptions and possible judgments into colorful and fun expressions. It is a way to amplify, transform and play with visual expressiveness.

Process work tools help my daily dealings with this creative project.

Process work, which has an inherent belief that the solution lies within the disturbance has been my main philosophical framework that has guided this study. The sensory grounded information of a persons' experience is used to explore the underlying process. Through applying process work to my symptoms, a fiery, irrational, spontaneous and ecstatic energy has appeared, which can also be seen in the figure of the witch in my childhood dream.

The spontaneous fiery spirit wants to be freed from the internalized as well as the external cultural and societal restrictions and inhibitions. Social expectations about behavior and life style, conventional attitudes about beauty and appearance and gender roles make it difficult to live this free and unconventional spirit.

This internal and external struggle appears in different facets of my life. The format of this "multi-method autobiography", consisting of interviews, dream interpretations, transcriptions of therapy sessions, innerwork, a poem, art, creative writing and an exercise, has been useful to convey this process.

The format of interviews with family members was a way to research and gather information about possible early conditions and causes that may have contributed to the development of my symptoms.

I learned from my mother that more people had the specific allergic constitutions and lung diseases that are described as being part of hereditary illness background of people with AD than I had known before.

On a relationship level, my father, having been oppressive and my mother being adaptive, created a dynamic that has not supported free and fiery expression and therefore has helped to suppress the underlying energy of my body symptoms. The Swiss culture has also supported the inhibition of this free and unconventional spirit.

I found that some of the interviewed people like my brother and my two ex-partners saw the underlying energy pattern of my symptoms as the fiery spirit that I also experience. My brother called it a volcano, Alan, a native Indian in a war dance and Jan, a fiery devil. My mother - although more identified with the suffering part of my process, experienced my symptom outbreaks in a more physical way - as a wave rolling over her.

I chose to transcribe therapy sessions to show how the underlying pattern of my childhood dream and its connection to the body symptoms manifest as dynamics in different aspects of my life.

I find that I deal in different ways with the parts of my childhood dream. At one point I need to hold the irrational spirit down in order to focus on a specific theme at all. The spontaneous and irrational witch has to be thrown out and suppressed in those moments. At other times I follow and identify more with the shamanic experiences that want to be lived, such as the eagle or the mountain. They fly high and free up in the air and don't get limited by any conventional or human restrictions. Ideally I move freely between the two experiences.

My described innerwork shows how I personally process my own body symptoms and how it enriches my life with deep experiences, deeper energies and helps me to express myself in a creative way, through writing and painting.

I have tried to show how the patterns of my childhood dream have a mythical significance throughout my life. This process is life-long and ongoing and moves through different facets of my life as I change and grow. I look at this life process both as a linear development and a timeless holograph.

I wanted to highlight the issues and the difficulties and struggles of living with chronic skin disease, and finding ways to get in contact with the underlying energy of the symptom.

Duff's (1993) description of living with chronic illness and seeing it as an alchemical transformation process that is a challenge to the identity relates to my experience of constantly being forced to deal with the arising problems and the physical limitations. I am the alchemist who is transforming the prima materia of my own personality - I am cooking in my own skin.

I see a chronic illness process as a spiritual quest in the way that symptoms are a continual driving force for further development.

My process is a shamanic journey. I have to go through different stages such as initiation, departure and return from the underworld as Campbell describes the individuation process in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (1973, 1949). Processing my skin symptoms is an ongoing adventure of going into the underworld of the unknown and unconscious and subsequent return into consciousness with the gold of a message from the symptom. The witch of my dream, with her mercurial transformative quality, is constantly forcing me to go into altered states and therefore into a world beyond this reality in a continual way.

I have at the same time a great attraction to and a great fear of going to the other world of altered states. In my everyday reality I try to hold on to the known material kind of reality as much as possible. My symptoms and creativity help me to get more in touch with the other world of trance and creative ecstasy, which I often experience while I paint, dance or am alone out in nature.

The skin as a symbol of transformation and eternal change in life teaches me how to continuously get rid of old ways like old skin - changing and transforming.

Growing up, I was mainly treated with western medicine within a causal and mechanistic paradigm. I have searched for different healing methods and have often grown hopeless about my illness. Trying to suppress the symptoms has proven to be unsuccessful in my case, which has driven me further in my search for relief and understanding.

Psychosomatic medicine shares the causal paradigm of western medicine and in my mind furthers the judgmental attitudes by making generalizations about psychological causes behind illness. By making statements about people with skin diseases such as having repressed emotionality and sexuality limits a person to one part of their being. The individual experience of a person's body symptom with all the different aspects of it gets missed. In my opinion there are general patterns but the diversity of experience needs to be acknowledged and explored.

AD is a typical case where the Newtonian and causal paradigm shows limited value.

Obermayer (1955) describes AD as very unpredictable and difficult to research because of the many variables at work. He says that proof of any causal role of any one allergen or group of allergens is lacking . The illness manifests in unpredictable ways as various symptoms at unforeseen times making it difficult to find any seeming connection (p.206f.). I see this unpredictability as an indicator for a new holistic paradigm which could explain experiences that are stable as well as those in constant flux.

Western medicine has to be thanked for an incredible amount of research and discovery about the causes of many diseases. However, in the vast field of chronic diseases it is often limited. Many people suffer from inexplicable and strange illnesses and syndroms and there are no cures to be offered by western medicine. People search for other healing methods such as homeopathy, psychotherapy, meditations, spiritual healing and others.

I see this as an indication of a change of paradigm from the causal to a more holistic one.

Through studying my own case I am realizing how I am often moving from one paradigm to another. I often find myself using a causal and mechanistic view of my own body symptoms. I think of my allergic reaction as having a causal reason and relate it to food intake, stress, or the fact that it is hay fever season, rather than to an irrational fiery spirit wanting to live through me. I see value and limitations in both. I want to have the freedom to feel at home with both paradigms and therefore be more holistic with myself.

The role of societal attitudes and stereotyped images about beauty and appearance along with also unwanted behavior such as expressiveness and emotionality can have a impact on the person with a symptom. By internalizing these disavowed attitudes feelings of self hate can arise. The internalized struggle between the spirit of nature wanting to be expressed and the outer influence of critical attitudes further the symptoms.

Psychosomatic medicine's statements about skin patients' problems with expression of emotionality contributes to stigmatization. Individuals with disabilities, especially visible ones often become carriers of negative projections and stereotypes from mainstream societal attitudes. I would like to look at the generalizations that psychosomatic medicine makes as part of the society's symptom that the individual is carrying. If the societal

projections about people's expression of emotions could be taken back and lived more in the mainstream society the symptom carriers could be relieved.

In my own experience of working with people with skin problems I have noticed that a lot of striving for freedom from societal restrictions and attitudes are held back within that skin. By processing these, the symptoms of a lot of wild, archaic, sensual and ecstatic behavior emerge.

I included an exercise about skin to invite the reader to explore their own "disavowed" skin phenomena and join me and other people with skin problems to live the emerging energy with me, for me and others!

The contribution that I am making with this long term autobiographical study is to add to the almost non existent literature of personal stories about living with skin disease. This work shows the psychologically useful exploration of my symptoms, especially the skin phenomenon. This long term study and personal history is a unique contribution to psychological approaches to skin symptoms. The use of a process oriented approach with its paradigm of implicit healing potential within the symptom itself proves useful in my case. It supports a holistic view of body symptoms and gives a meaning to the symptom and its underlying process for change.

Further research about body symptoms and the social and cultural implications from them are being done in the Lava Rock Clinics, where people get help in processing their symptoms. I am indebted to the facilitators and participants of this ongoing community oriented clinic that works with the many-leveled issues of symptoms. Psychologists, and medical doctors from various strands of the healing professions take part in it. My hopes are that more of this kind of exploration and research will be done within medicine in general.

Another area of interest that could be researched further is the idea of the childhood dream being a life myth and holograph of development for a person's life. I would be interested in researching further the possibility of changing one's life myth by outgrowing it.

The area of body symptoms and chronic illness and the psychological aspects is a rich field for any further research.

Seeing how creativity plays a major role in my own case I suggest that more research be done in the area of long term chronic illness and the connection to creativity.

I experienced this study of my own body symptoms as a very inspiring process of personal growth and healing. By investigating the different aspects of my somatic process I connected deeply with my underlying energy and excitement for life.

My biggest hopes would come true if this work could inspire other people with chronic symptoms to discover their own spirit and find gold in their illness experiences.

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# APPENDIX I.

## PARTICIPATION-, VIDEO- AND AUDIO-RELEASE FORM

I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate

in Silvia Camastral's research project about herself.

I agree to participate in

a) interviews

b) therapy sessions

I agree to have this session audio-taped and/or video-taped.

I agree that Silvia Camastral can use this information for

her dissertation with the title "Getting Under my Own

Skin." She will treat this information confidentially.

Place and date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

