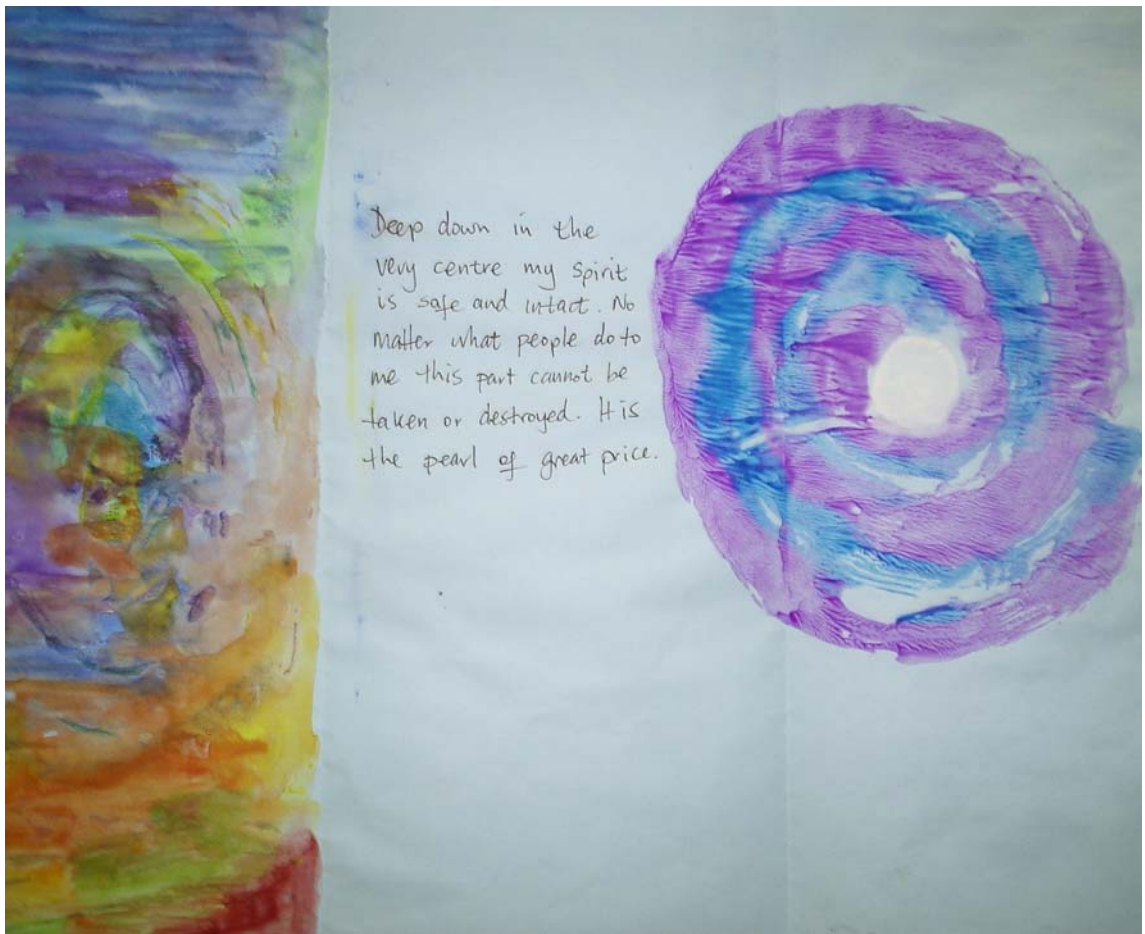


## CHAPTER ONE

### THE START OF SOMETHING



#### *Background to the study*

Writing this introduction has been a challenge, initially unsure of where to begin, or how to explain the journey I have been on, in a way that is meaningful to the reader, and in a form that satisfies the requirements of a Doctor of Psychology thesis. The title of this chapter is indicative of my experience, in that I was totally unaware of the change I was to undergo and of what was to follow from my initial encounter with The Map of Loss (Snyder, 1999), referred to hereafter as The Map. Indeed this theme has continued throughout the research process and writing journey. Fortunately, the collaborators in this research have expressed similar experiences. To date I have traveled through The Map in its entirety on six separate occasions, either as a workshop participant, observer or co-facilitator. Each time there is something new to learn, another layer uncovered. Undertaking this research and exploring The Map in greater depth have added further layers to that experience, and yet I feel there is more to learn.

### *A personal experience*

Whilst co-ordinating a Chronic Disease Project designed to address the health issues of an Aboriginal community in the South West of Western Australia I was introduced to The Map of Loss (Snyder,1999). The Map was the basis for what was termed by the working committee to be mentoring training for interested members of the community. This mentoring workshop and my introduction to The Map occurred in 2003. I was amazed by the responses to The Map. The changes were not just noticeable on an individual level. There were also significant changes within the group dynamics. To see the range of issues that were dealt with, the commonalities illuminated and the connections established was a life changing experience both personally and professionally. This was the beginning of what has been a most interesting, challenging, frustrating and ultimately rewarding journey.

Following that mentoring workshop, I had the opportunity to attend a professional development workshop for people interested in using The Map in their work. Reflecting on this experience, I was intrigued with the range of backgrounds of those attending the workshop and others I had heard of who were using The Map. It seemed that people from all walks of life were providing positive anecdotes and were really keen to see more and more people become aware of this Map and its potential. There were people with a clinical background working in community mental health services, or private practice, teachers, church leaders, youth workers and others working in various community development roles. As I learned more about The Map and its applications, I was given the opportunity to assist Snyder in providing training to other professionals, and again at a workshop provided as part of a community employment education program for young men.

Having journeyed through The Map many times, I have felt the effects personally, and have witnessed the many ways it affects others. I share the views of those I met early on, regarding its effectiveness and positive impact for individuals, groups and communities. The connections are amazing. I am excited by the opportunities this provides me as a community psychologist, whose passion is connection, nurturing human capacity, the connectedness of life, and finding ways to facilitate connection on an individual, family, community and global level. Along with this enthusiasm and obvious bias, however, came the realisation and concern as little formal evaluation had been undertaken and the theoretical underpinnings had not been

written about. With increasing numbers of people using The Map, I felt this needed to be addressed.

Thus began this research journey, which has provided its very own swamps, avoidance marshes and rocky paths for me to negotiate. The process has at times been overwhelming. Trying to identify discrete quantifiable aspects of The Map in order to establish an effective basis for evaluation proved challenging. Therefore it was decided to investigate more broadly why people from vastly different backgrounds, working across differing sectors of the community have been able to adopt The Map effectively as part of their work. What is it about The Map that works? The study has been undertaken in two phases. The first phase involved the analysis of de-identified archival data as a means to developing interview questions for phase two of the study. Phase two involved interviews with professionals using The Map.

### ***Purpose of the study***

The purpose of this study was to explore the qualities of The Map of Loss, to identify the important features and aspects of The Map, and explore the links to theory. The theoretical underpinnings of The Map have not been written about to date. Therefore, exploring the links to theory is an important aspect of this study. As a result, the theoretical aspects will be built from the data and discussed in the concluding chapter of this report. It was anticipated this study would provide evidence for The Map's utility in addressing issues of connection for the individual, family, workplace and community. The focus was on understanding why and how professionals were using The Map in various settings with differing populations. It was considered through personal interviews professionals would be able to provide their perspectives on The Map and how useful or adaptable they had found The Map to be both personally and in relation to their work, thus offering answers to what is it about The Map that works.

As I am unable to divorce myself from The Map and the experiences I have had as a result of knowing it, I have taken the view that The Map is an effective tool and have looked at why and how it lends itself to such wide and varying applications. This thesis purposively maintains a broad focus and is written in the hope that others will come to journey with The Map, will be inspired to learn it, to understand it, to work with it, to teach it, to live by it, or completely reject it, more importantly to test, and apply it within their own practice and theoretical understandings, personally, and within their working and community environments.

### *Narrative approach*

The Map is an experiential journey. The only way to learn about and understand The Map is to go through the process. This aspect placed myself, as the researcher, on equal footing with the participants as we have all experienced The Map on an individual level, along with seeing its effects on the client base. As a result the participants in this research will be referred to as collaborators, as much of their journey with The Map is included also. Knowing from the outset that this project would carry the influence of my personal journey through The Map, along with that of the research journey, it was decided to adopt a narrative approach. The research journey itself has been a journey through The Map. Many times have I been in ‘the swamp’ overwhelmed by the process and data, and in need of some time in the ‘forest of hope’ resting and reflecting on the process, to gain a more objective and effective view of what I was trying to achieve.

Narrative research is considered a meaning-making endeavour. From listening to the stories people tell, we can learn how people as individuals, and as groups, or communities, make sense of their experiences (Chase, 2003; Josselson & Lieblich, 1999; Rappaport, 2000). “Narrative thinking is a successful method of organising perception, thought, memory and action” (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986, p123). As discussed by Bruner (1990), if the object of psychology is to provide plausible interpretations of human behaviour in an effort to understand and provide representation of human life, then narrative is the spirit in which we should proceed.

As The Map is an experiential model, the best way of understanding the journey is by listening to people’s stories and meaning making of their experience. Stories provide unity, continuity, permanence and connection to our experiences and have a central and powerful role in effective communication with others (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Rappaport, 1993). Stories convey the complexity, the concrete details and context of the lived experience. They suit our common knowledge, cultural histories and expression, and are open for public and social negotiation (Abma, 1999). Life is a series of connections, a series of shared meanings, communicated through our storytelling, providing us with a shared insight into how we make sense of our world, our fellow humans and our selves.

Rappaport (1995) discusses the link between research practice and empowerment, and the importance of the narrative approach as a means of making collaborative links between the researcher, practitioner and the communities in which they practice. Rappaport (1993, 1995, 2000) highlights the use of narrative as a means

of supporting and empowering individuals and communities. Combining the process, and practice, of community psychology, to create an interdisciplinary focus, and collaborative partnerships with those we study. Stewart (2000) adds to this discussion regarding the value of qualitative approaches and narrative, for community psychology. As community psychology is “a discipline that seeks to work *with* rather than *on* people” (Stewart, 2000, p.276), qualitative narrative approaches are more suited as they are open to investigating the realities of everyday life for people as opposed to ensuring generalisation and universal categories. Because it allows for the complexities involved in the way that we make sense of life, the way we function and relate as individuals, groups and communities, narrative allows for a more integrated practice.

### ***Grounded theory***

As with The Map and the narrative approach, grounded theory is also a journey. The journey has two goals implicit in the grounded theory process, generating theory and doing social research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is a general method for developing theory that is grounded in data that are systematically gathered and analysed (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As stated by Charmaz (2003), the methods consist of “systematic inductive guidelines for gathering, synthesising, analysing and conceptualising qualitative data to construct theory (p.82).” As summarised by Creswell (1998) and Charmaz (2003), the purpose of the grounded theory journey is to develop a theoretical proposition, or present a visual picture, of the theory from the data, that relates to a particular situation or area of study.

Grounded theory takes a flexible and inductive approach to research, and lends itself to understanding diverse processes (Charmaz, 2003), in this instance, investigating why, and how, people from vastly different backgrounds, working across differing sectors of the community, have been able to adopt The Map as part of their work. By drawing on the different theoretical aspects identified in the data, and other important features highlighted by the stories told, links to theory could be explored. This provided further understanding of the relationships operating within The Map, as evidence for why and how it lends itself to work effectively across individual, group and community situations and settings. The inductive nature of grounded theory and narrative study being more a set of approaches and principles (Hoshmand, 2005; Rappaport, 1993) allowed for flexibility in method and approach to the study. This provided the opportunity to engage more fully with the research process and data, to ensure emerging ideas and theories are more fully investigated throughout the journey. This ensured a

more open and collaborative relationship with the people being studied, allowing for revisiting with collaborators and following up on ideas or themes where necessary.

### *Narrative Writing*

I have chosen to heed the encouragement of Polkinghorne (1997), “to conceive of my research as a journey, whose destination is an increased understanding of human beings,” and their relationship with The Map, and to “use the narrative format to report my investigative travels (p19).” As The Map takes you on a journey, this format provides a logical way of approaching and writing this research thesis, particularly as I could never have envisaged or predicted this journey at its outset.

As discussed by Polkinghorne (1997), the purpose of this approach is to present the knowledge gained as a result of my research practice, in a narrative format to convince readers of the “pragmatic reasonableness of the knowledge claims (p7).” As the audience you are crucial to this process, as you are the ones who need to be convinced by the knowledge expressed in this report. In embracing this approach the judgement to be made is whether the journey undertaken here, and the resulting knowledge accumulated, effectively provides an understanding of the usefulness of The Map.

The narrative approach to writing allows the researcher to organise the events experienced and decisions made throughout the research process into a unified whole. The narrative report provides the opportunity to display this practice, as a whole drawn together and presented in this thesis, writing in the first person as the teller of my own research story. As a result, the narrative report presents the research outcome asking the reader to judge the acceptability of a claim rather than arguing for it. The voices of the collaborators who participated in the research are allowed to speak. They appear as co-actors, affecting and contributing to the unfolding research process and ultimately to our understanding of The Map.