

Insider Witnessing Practices: A Preliminary Discussion: Part One

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Abstract

This is the first of three working papers intended to introduce you to one of the most recent developments in narrative practice called Insider Witnessing Practices. Given the fact that we are still in the in the midst of innovating this practice, in this first paper, we have decided to offer the reader an account of the emerging history of the development of this practice. Our hope in this preliminary paper is to tell the story of this history in such a way that provides the reader with an insider account of our collective experiences as we engaged in the exciting and often unexplainable outcomes that resulted from our initial experiences with Insider Witnessing Practices.

Preliminary Results

Quite contrary to custom, we are commencing with, what we are referring to as preliminary results. We experimented in the M.S./Ph.D Couple & Family Therapy Programs in 2015 and 2016 at North Dakota State University which auspices The Family Therapy Center, a community based clinic in Fargo, ND. The Family Therapy Center welcomes clients from diverse and underserved communities at a sliding fee scale based on 'ability to pay.' The average fee for services is \$7 per session. Student therapists in the programs provide therapy services under the supervision of the clinical faculty in the CFT program.

We soon realized the results, even from day one, were beyond our wildest expectations and for that reason alone we immediately began archiving, recording, and scrutinizing each and every session plus engaging in regular follow up interviews one week and then six months after the Act II with everyone concerned. In some instances, we did far more. From the beginning, we sought everyone to join us as co-researchers and readily admitted that we were all in it together and that no one knew any better than anyone else. But everyone seemed thrilled by what was happening before everyone's eyes. Whatever enthusiasm we brought to this, it was matched by our co-researchers, students, and clients alike.

The clients who have participated in this practice have evaluated the Act II, on average a 90-minute interview, to be equivalent in value to at least 15-20 sessions of the narrative family therapy they have previously received with their student therapists. However, there is one almost unanimous qualification. Everyone insisted, on the one hand, that even this high number was likely an underestimate and, on the other, that they would never have made the

dramatic changes that occurred in the Act II no matter how many sessions they would eventually have had. Miranda, age 19, without being asked, evaluated each pause and the conversation that followed it to be worth one session. Other clients when asked have confirmed her evaluation.

Even more surprising for us, since this took place within the context of a family therapy training program, was the student therapists' evaluations. They evaluated their participation in the IWP process, which for them lasted on average 3 hours, was equivalent in value to one to two years of training in our family therapy program.

What were we to think of this? We often wondered whether this was merely beginner's luck or if all of us were besotted? Or if we were very likely risking making fools of ourselves for presenting IWP practice in public at such an early stage? We had many occasions to check with one another, worried if we were becoming carried away and were vulnerable to poor judgement brought about by unjustified optimism. Was this a winning streak which would soon end with the bottom dropping out of it? So far, in 16 independently researched IWPs, our beginner's luck is holding.

Befuddled and Bedazzled

We (Amanda, Emily, and I) met with Miranda on February 25, 2015, for the first Act II of what we have come to refer to as 'insider witnessing practices', the obverse or counterpoint to Michael White's 'outsider witnessing practices' (White, 1995). The session lasted an hour and a half. For all of us it had a profundity that was far beyond anything than we had anticipated. After fare welling Miranda, we all retired to my (Tom's) office to unpack what had just taken place. Something inexplicable had taken us over. Each of us, although not entirely oblivious to the other, remained in a world of our own, a kind of trance and stunned silence that we were comfortable to remain in. The time as measured on our watches was thirty minutes but the time we experienced was more or less timeless. On the one hand, it somehow felt as if time itself stood still and on the other, it was as if time had run away from us. As we gradually withdrew from our respective worlds, we found ourselves remaining strangely speechless despite a desire to speak about what had just transpired. We all knew we had just passed through a singular experience but found ourselves longing for words to describe it. After a few failed attempts to locate words to describe what exactly it was that our hearts, minds, and bodies were experiencing, we decided to sit together in awe of the beauty of a moment that we would never soon forget. Tom later described it as being in a 'wordless state' for it wasn't that we couldn't speak but that the profundity of the experience was beyond the reach of our collective vocabularies.

While the hour was already quite late, I (Tom) couldn't wait to let David in on the beauty of what had just transpired. And, while I knew that this was a practice of David's invention, I was also keenly aware that he had only up to this point been able to dream about its potential to transmogrify¹ experience. So, late as it was, I sat down at my computer and sent the following email to David in Copenhagen on March 26th.

Hi David,

I hope that your trip to Europe continues to go well. I wanted to give you an update on our progress with the IWP project. We did our first Act II interview tonight and despite the folly of our own newness to this type of interviewing, the result was beyond our wildest expectations. Words just can't do justice to the experience. I think that we were all (including the therapist and client) left speechless for a while after the interview. As Miranda was watching the portrayal by her therapist, Emily, it appeared to us that she was transfixed by every word of Emily's portrayal of her. She seemed most engaged: in fact, she looked as if she was entranced throughout the interview, when our conversations with Emily in the Act I went in directions that Miranda very likely would never have imagined. At such moments, we had to stop the recording several times to allow her to catch up with the 'surprisingness' (Bakhtin) of these conversations. And while she found many of these conversations strange, at the very same time she acknowledged that they had a certain familiarity. In addition, she insisted that Emily's that portrayal of her in general was "right on." In fact, at the very end of the interview, I asked her a question something like this, "After witnessing Emily's portrayal of you, you mentioned that there were many things that she got exactly right and other things that were not quite right; things that you would have said differently. And, there were other matters that she said that were completely new to you; matters that you had never considered before. I am wondering Miranda, in the end do you think that Emily got you right?" Her immediate and enthusiastic response was, "Yes, yes. She got it exactly right!" Next I asked her, "Would you say that even when she got it wrong or when she came up with something completely new to you that in a sense she somehow still got it right in spirit rather than factually right?" She said, oddly enough, even these discrepant portrayals of her were exactly right and that the whole experience has brought her to a place that she could never have imagined beforehand. She quizzed herself and us, "How did I get here?" We had to admit that we were as puzzled as she was but we promised her that sooner or later we were determined to get the bottom of this.

Emily was enthralled by the experience (as were Amanda and I). As a requirement of the course, we have the students write a reflection on the experience of both acts of the

¹ To transform in a surprising and often magical way

IWP process. I think that her reflection is powerful and speaks to the beauty of these interviews both as a way to transform the therapy process as well as a way to transform the teaching of narrative ideas. What really stands out to me, David, is that even our own limitations as interviewers due to our inexperience could not get in the way of the transformational nature of this amazing new way of interviewing. So, I can't agree more with your comment that this is definitely not fool's gold and we may be on to something that is worth so much more than gold.

Thank you so much for inviting us to be a part of this amazing project. I think it is safe to say that even this one Act II was priceless.

Gratefully,
Tom

As it turned out, David had just returned to his hotel after an exhilarating but exhausting day of training in Denmark when he received my email. His response, like so many others that have come since, shared his utter amazement at what he was reading.

Hi Tom,

Your phrase "beyond our wildest imagination" really invigorates me after a very intense, very interactive 9am-4pm teaching day. I know look forward with 2 days with colleagues at a Child, Adolescent, and Family Mental Health Service. I loved your expression of "priceless", a word that doesn't show up much these days in text. A priceless word! Tom, I have known or perhaps believed that this would be so but up until very recently, I have had no tangible evidence to support such convictions. I am so thankful to you all for having the courage to try something out that was new to you. If I am any judge, it is only a matter of a few more such interviews before you will be 'at home' with this and will be able to find your way around and I suspect find some as yet unknown avenues. Thanks!

Emily's comments are 'priceless' too. Please pass on my sincere thanks for their thoughtfulness. I really feel like I want to rush off to the US Patent Office and get a patent on this not to preclude others from it but to substantiate it. Recently, a 16-year-old I interviewed in Melbourne had this to say: "It was an insight on an insight." Please tell Emily I feel the same kind of gratitude to her for her comment, "Something happened here today that I could never possibly forget." This has really made my day!

Thanks again,
David.

A week later, Amanda and I had our second Act II with Sara and her clients Nicki and her 15-year-old daughter Payton. As we sat together preparing for the interview, Amanda and I confided in one another how the ineffable experience of the previous week was still imprinted on our minds and hearts. Neither of us had been able to shake it off as we went about our quotidian life over that week. While we both had a great deal of anticipation for our forthcoming interview with Sara, we couldn't help but to wonder, 'Was last week just a fluke or a once in a lifetime experience? Is it possible for this Act II interview to even come close to or approximate the profundity and beauty of the first?' We decided that we would be happy to settle for something that was even one-tenth of the magnitude of the meeting with Emily and Miranda which would still be far beyond what we could have hoped for given our 35 years of experience as therapists over our respective careers.

Shortly into the interview with Sara, Nicki, and Payton, we knew that something remarkable was afoot yet again. And, even though we had been through this the week before, we were still unprepared for the overwhelming sense of what this meeting promised for everyone in the therapy room that night. After a fare welling of Nicki and Payton which included several reciprocal expressions of gratitude, we (Sara, Amanda, and I) returned to my office to do our best to try to unpack what had just transpired. Yet again, words seemed to fail us. From time to time, we attempted to say something that might give words to what we were experiencing and each time we tried, all that we could muster was an extended and collective exhalation. Finally, after fifteen minutes of a joyous shared silence, I wondered aloud: 'Is this the consequence of participating in a practice that is concerned with the dignification of others? Is this what it feels like to be in the presence of such immense promise?' At the time, I was unaware that this word was not in the Oxford English Dictionary. I just looked it up. We all concurred that this was likely the case and only then were we able to find other words to approximate what had been up to that point indescribable. Sara responded, 'I am not sure how to describe what I am feeling but it is as if my heart is bursting with hope. This is like nothing I have ever experienced in my life. I had no idea that feeling this way was even a possibility in my life, let alone in my work with clients.'

Once again, despite the lateness of the hour, I felt compelled to email David about another singular experience.

Dear David,

Amanda and I just completed with our second Act II. And once again, words are simply incapable of communicating what the experience was like for all involved. Your enthusiasm (what you refer to as 'overenthusiasm') for the transformative effect of

these interviews has definitely been warranted. In fact, I think that you could even afford to take on extra measure of overenthusiasm given our experiences so far. All of us, including the Nicki and her 15-year-old daughter Payton, felt an exhilaration brought about by what this conversation seemed to promise for their immediate future and ours as well. The sense of hope and promise in the room was so strong that it could literally be felt. We were still wordless even an hour after the interview ended. The therapist, Sara, was overwhelmed by the experience, commenting that it was one of the most powerful and beautiful experiences of her life. She said her heart felt like it was exploding with hopefulness. I must say that my heart felt the same way and I think it is safe to say that Amanda would agree. Our hearts were moved beyond words in the presence of such extreme promise.

Gratefully,
Tom

David responded with the following,

Dear Tom,

I cannot tell you how tired I am. I made a mistake in my bookings thinking I would have a day off when I arrived last night. Instead I had to teach all day; very hot and humid here in Singapore. And because of the 5 hour difference, I awoke at 2:30am (7:30am in Copenhagen/Salzburg) and couldn't get back to sleep.

I cannot tell you how much my spirits were lifted by your email. Tom and Amanda, this is all verging on the unbelievable and I cannot thank you both and your students enough for starting to make this 'known.' In fact, if I thought IWP should be known, I am now convinced that should be so. Do you think IWPs could very well make the same difference that the one-way screen made to family therapy? And perhaps even psychotherapy at large? This is all like a very long dream of mine coming true. Got to go to bed but I was so elated that I read and reread your email and savoured it like one does the finest possible Bordeaux.

Warmly,
David

We have now completed 16 IWPs with students and clients and with each one, we continue to be amazed at the transformative effects that it has had on all of our lives. Words like gob smacked, bedazzled, and befuddled became common place in our email conversations as our minds tried to come to terms with the beauty of what we have witnessed time and time again as we have engaged in further IWP interviews. While both of us (David and Tom) are prone to

exaggeration, we would like to assure the reader that our impressions were confirmed time and time again by both student therapists and clients. From the outset (See Miranda in the above), we have invited everyone who participated to join us as co-researchers. Our purpose in doing so was to collectively articulate such wordless experiences. We were aware that our clients themselves struggled to find ways to capture the essence of what transpired during the Act II. The words that popped up depicted this practice as “magical,” “wondrous,” “beautiful,” and “dignified.”

This paper is a very preliminary account of the development of IWPs at North Dakota State University in partnership with David Epston. As much as anything else, it is a tentative attempt to understand what had befallen each and every one of us that first day and on every subsequent occasion. As such this paper will be a summary of all of its participants' impressions as supervisors/consultants (Tom, Amanda, and David), students (Ana, Ashley, Emily, and Sara), and clients.

When we (Tom, Amanda, and David) came together to explore how IWPs might be relevant as both a therapy and a pedagogy in a Master's/Ph.D. Couple and Family Therapy program, we had the distinct impression that we were embarking on a journey that would take us to yet uncharted territories in narrative family therapy. A journey metaphor is apt for us as we knew so very little about what IWPs might become. As David would frequently remind us, we were in the process of inaugurating something entirely novel, and we were making our way as we proceeded, not knowing exactly where we were going and certainly without any specific destination. Looking back now from collective vantage points, we can see that it was this ‘spirit of adventure’ that Michael and David had advocated for in as close to as they ever came to a manifesto (Epston & White, 1992). They declared,

With regard to ideas and practices, we do not believe that we are in any one place at a particular point in time, rarely in particular places for very long. In making this observation, we are not suggesting that the developments in our work are sharply discontinuous- they are not. Nor are we suggesting that our values and our commitments are varying- they are not. And, we are definitely not arguing for forms of eclecticism which we eschew. However, we are drawing attention to the fact that one of the aspects associated with this work that is of central importance to us is the spirit of adventure... What will be the direction of this evolution? It could be tempting to make pronouncements about this. But these would be too hard to live by. And besides, our sense is that most of the ‘discoveries’ that have played a significant part in the development of our practices... have been made after the fact (in response to unique outcomes in our work with families), with theoretical considerations assisting us to extend the limits of these practices. We acknowledge the fact that it is always so much easier to be ‘wise’ in hindsight than in foresight (p. 9)

As in the above, the discoveries came first and ever since we have been chasing after them with theory (this will be discussed in paper 2).

While we have been on our shared journey for a year and a half now, what we have discovered so far was primarily the result of an intensive three months of practice, reflection on our practice, and reflection on our reflection on our practice during the months of February, March, and April of 2015. During that time, between us we dedicated 30 to 40 hours a week engaging in Acts 1 and 2 with students and clients, the transcription of every interview, a detailed review of each transcript, and furthermore, what has been referred to as 'engaged supervision' (Ingamells, Epston, & Carlson, unpublished paper) on all early transcripts of IWP interviews.

Engaged supervision was invented by David some years ago as a form of apprenticeship for veterans who wished to commit themselves to not only the craft of narrative family therapy but its artistry as well. Briefly, this involves the apprentice, with their client's consent, transcribing an interview and submitting it to as soon as possible to the apprenticer². The apprenticer after reading a very brief summary of the matter at hand scrolls down on her/his computer screen until there has been one exchange between the therapist and the client. For example,

Therapist: Hearing me read the letter I wrote you, is there anything you would like me to change?

Client: Yes there is. I need to tell you quite a lot has changed since then.

At this point, the apprenticer without reading any further enters into the second version of the transcript. After doing so, she/he scrolls down yet again to the next exchange and does something similar. This continues until the very end of the transcript and is then forwarded to the apprentice and to the client (e.g., this might not be so if the client were a minor or other discretions).

While intense, none of us experienced this time as a burden in any way. Rather, it was as if we had entered a liminal space where time seemed to stand still. It served as an incubator for our learning and theorizing of IWPs in a way likely would have never been possible outside such a laboratory of invention. We can't underestimate the value of these initial few months. Of course, it was the transformative effect of each of the interviews that sustained us and pushed us forward. It was certainly an invigorating time that none of us will soon forget.

² A word that David invented to describe the person who performs the apprenticeship.

During this time, we (David and Tom) were in continual contact with one another via email. And, while we were literally a world apart from one another, we both felt a sense of urgency to respond to one another in the immediacy of the moment and not allow the natural ruin of time to tarnish the proliferating discoveries or ‘brainwaves’ as we referred to them that were happening. Given the eighteen-hour time difference between Fargo, ND, USA and Auckland, New Zealand, this was a bit complicated and meant working well into the night for me (Tom). Conservatively, we engaged in five or six email conversations each day during this time. And these were not your ordinary emails, as each email consisted of pages of our deliberations. It was a time of heightened discovery and we found ourselves entirely enthralled with this practice and anxiously awaited one another’s response.

We have spent the last year searching for some ways to adequately describe the transformative experience of these initial IWP interviews and theorize them. As we had decided that we would be to engage in a co-research project with our students and clients, I (Tom) invited David to come to Fargo to interview students and clients about their experiences of IWPs and to petition their assistance in finding a vocabulary to communicate this practice to others. We refer to this first set of interviews as the first round of a several round co-research process. After the Fargo co-research interviews with both student therapists and clients were transcribed, David reviewed each of the transcripts looking for their own unique accounts and theorizing that emerged during the interview and interpolated further queries directly into the transcripts. This amended version (Round 2) was forwarded back to the person concerned who responded as they saw fit in to the selfsame transcript (Round 3). This would be emailed back to David and these rounds would be continued until there was little else that could be said. As a qualitative researcher (Tom) with over 16 years of experience, I have rarely read clients and student therapists able to put their experiences of therapy in such eloquent terms. Going from round to round in this way encourages elaborations that often become sheer invention.

Throughout this entire process, we also began searching for low theoretical explanations (Halberstam, 2011) for the dramatic outcomes. And, in honor of the spirit of the history of narrative therapy, we looked high and low for theories and practices that were on the borderlands between narrative therapy and anthropology. It was our hope that such a search would offer us some guidance or signposts in the uncharted territories of narrative practice in which we had ventured. While, on the one hand, the theoretical discoveries that we made along the way were entirely fascinating, on the other hand, in many ways they represented a return home to some of the originating ideas that informed David and Michael’s development of narrative therapy in the early 1980s. And while these discoveries were fascinating, they will always remain secondary to the insider knowledges that emerged during our co-research project with our students and clients.

Ana and Maria: Magical Loving

Ana Huerta Lopez (then an MS student now a Ph.D. student) co-presented a workshop with us in Minneapolis in May 2015 and her mother Maria Guadalupe Huerta asked if she might attend merely to witness her daughter's presentation. We insisted that instead that she join us for the entire day. The following is a bilingual conversation between Maria, Ana, Tom, and David mediated by email and telephone calls. Maria was not allowed to proceed in schooling beyond age 11, but then migrated to the United States when Ana was a quite young. Ana was the first in her family to graduate from a University. David's interview with Ana in Fargo soon extended to including her mother Maria. They were foremost in drawing our attention to magic as pertaining to IWPs, however we soon traced the cultural and historical genealogy of this magic to Mexico in particular and Latin America in general. In that sense, magic here is of a different order than Anglo-American notions of magic as a technology of trickery compare to 'magical realism' a literature associated with Latin America. This discussion has been extremely provocative and parallels the reimagining of narrative therapy in Latin Americas by Marcela Polanco and her colleagues (Polanco, 2011).

Maria

Watching the IWP interviews in Minneapolis, I saw a certain kind of hope that personified a particular kind of passageway that could possibly lead to a better way of living. Within this passageway of hope you no longer experience fear nor shame but instead you embrace yourself and are now set free.

I know from my life sometimes there is not a straight clear or easy path. I saw in the interviews those who have traveled through disappointment, pain, and suffering to reach the end of their journeys. At the end of their journeys I could see that they experienced a healing despite the pain and suffering they had endured.

It was a magical love, endowed with such munificent and tender care that was dear to my heart and my history of life. This was so palpable for me throughout the day. In fact my soul was rejuvenated and awakened and reconnected to what is important in my life.

In the IWP interviews, you discovered the magic of the other person. You came to an intimate knowing of your client and were able to express the magic that you felt in her presence. You were able to become intimately acquainted with the magic in your client and in her life. You listened to her without judgement, rejection, or shaming.

Ana

Magical love was something that came to my mind as well. It appeared to me that my mom's loving and daring spirit came alive on that day. Such magical love moves us to believe in ourselves and love ourselves wholeheartedly; such magical love influences us to experience the best knowing of ourselves and to honor those knowings. It becomes even more of a magical love when we can do the same for others. Magical love embraces hope and healing. In Mexican culture there is definitely more magic in the world compared to Anglo culture.

Magical loving is the heart and soul of IWPs. This is how it comes to life and carries out such genuine transformations. I don't think there is anything more momentous and significant than to discover the magic of the other person and in return to express that magic directly to them. How incredibly astonishing! Is there anything more beautiful than this?

Both Acts are magical as they create new realms of possibilities. Until my mother drew my attention to it, I was not aware that I was doing magical loving. We may not be fully aware of it but in the earlier interviews have been seeking out the magic of the other and in Act I we begin to perform the magic we have gained from the other but now on their behalf. In fact, I would say that we are performing magic in both Acts.

Much of the magic has to do with the hopes that we carry with us into these performances. As we perform these aspirations and desires for our clients in the Act I, the client then becomes witness to these hopes in the Act II. As a consequence, they become authors their desired lives on their own behalf but by means of their own magic.

What the IWPs make me think of in terms of my Mexican culture is connection. Here, all of our histories and chronicles of life come together as one entity- survival and sacred hope. Everyone involved in an IWP carries hopes from their own past, present, and for their future. This hope is sustained in this magical realm that for this moment is limitless and immeasurable. Every one of us through our own histories of life have joined together in this moment of fate with their client.

I believe that my mom has been key to my belief and recognition of magical hope which has provided me with the space to be transformed and experience my life wholeheartedly. It is not only my own spirit that carries me through and awakens me every day, but also the spirit of my mother's undying love and fearlessness, and that of all my ancestors that have come before me. In the IWP, it was not only me that existed in those moments, but also the lives of those before me and those that will come after me. The IWPs connected me more deeply to the chance I have in my life to create a different history that stands against the suffering and

oppression that so many of my ancestors have endured. Knowing that their presence is alongside me is what makes this so magical.

Sara: “Re-Storied by Beauty” (Samuel, 2015)

In response to the question that David asked (How would you rank the experience of the IWP?) Sara replied that it would rank in the top three experiences of her life. David then asked, “What other experiences from the stock of your experiences would you compare to this?”

I know that for me the family trip to Flathead Lake in Glacier National Park that we all took with my grandmother as her last wish before she passed away is the only comparable experience that comes to mind. I never thought anything in my life could ever compare to this. I remember all of us looking at this serene, peaceful, beautiful lake with the mountains in the background and being overcome by a deep seated feeling of tranquility. The Act II provided me with the same incredible depth of feeling that the stars were aligned and I was at peace at that very moment in time in my life. It was as if time stood still; or I was opening a whole new door in my life; or I had finally solved a million-piece puzzle that I had been working on for a majority of my life. These are just some of the ways that I would describe this deep sense that I felt after our Act II.

Just knowing the impact that the IWP has had on Payton and Nikki’s lives has provided me with such a profound sense of gratitude and fulfillment that I had the opportunity to be part of this experience! In addition, on a more personal level, I have known for many years that I wanted to be a therapist but it was not until that precise moment after the Act II that I felt the greatest sense of clarity about the direction which my life was taking. I am incredibly grateful to all of you for allowing me to be a part of this amazing opportunity!

Ashley: The effect on a newcomer therapist’s confidence by participating in an IWP

Ashley when commenting on David’s query as to how she guessed her client, Lisa might respond to this question, “Has anyone so far in your life listened to you and hear you in such a fashion?” replied, “She would have said No, no one has. I think she did want to vindicate me in some way. I think she also didn’t believe that the way that I listened was possible since she hadn’t previously experienced it. I wouldn’t say that she was incredulous but rather she was astonished that such listening was possible.

No matter what doubts I may have about my abilities as a therapist, I realized that I had provided her with what she needed from me which was to be heard. In terms of me feeling like I was an effective therapist, that increased exponentially. She told me so, but even if she

hadn't, watching her responses to my portrayal of her during the Act II would have been more than enough proof for me.

When I think of being a student therapist and having a supervisor in the room that feels kind of scary because 'oh my client's going to think that my supervisor is better than I am.' I found that no matter how many amazing questions my supervisors asked I was still a great therapist as a result of this experience because the way I represented her in the Act I. It was rewarding for me to see Lisa respond so zealously to my telling of her counter story, especially regarding the moral values by which she lived her life. I came to the conclusion that without me there couldn't have been an Act II. In some ways, I was implicated in Tom and Amanda's great questions. Lisa could only say, "you were me" to me. I was the only one there who could have achieved this point of connection with her. I would say that their great questions were evidence of how great my relationship with Lisa really was and how much work we had done together and how great she is. No amount of greatness by our awesome interviewers could have trumped the greatness of our relationship.

Conclusions by our Client Co-Researchers

By way of conclusion, below is a very small sample of client descriptions of their experience immediately after the Act II interview.

It was like I opened a box of my life and had the pieces of it set out organized on a table which provided me proof of all of the accomplishments I had made and everything I made it through in my life so far. I have a huge new appreciation for myself. I am truly amazed by how far I have come. This type of therapy allows for the client to look at their life (especially their past) in a way that's never been done before. I always felt that my therapist Emily understands me, but I have never had a therapist show me that before in a way that is so true. The process of the interview helped me view myself very differently and provided "proof" of my successes, which was a way to ease into my self-worth. The Act II was like a sampler of ideas that I could think about and pick the ones I felt were most important to pursue both in therapy and in my own life. (Miranda, age 19)

I feel more in harmony with myself, as if I am more in tune with some sort of truth. Last week, the Act II took me by my hand and together we covered a great distance. I didn't feel forced or as if I was being pulled along too fast. But I felt like I was propelled forward. Now I feel as if I am now standing on my own ground but in the lead. What I found so powerful in all of this was an acceleration of finding new ways to consider my place in the world. (Lisa, 40's)

My therapist, Ashley, was very good at her portrayal of me, almost too good! I was surprised by a lot of my extreme my reactions were regarding questions that were asked of me during the Act II about how far I had come in my life despite everything I had been through. In fact, I didn't realize how far I had come until I heard Ashley's Lisa saying it out loud. It was nice to see how far I've come. Just how far... FAR! The Act II allowed me to step back and see ahead, something I hadn't previously considered was even possible. Now I see great value in this practice. Please share this with everyone! I felt really connected to my Ashley's Lisa so much so that knew that I had been truly heard by her during our previous sessions. This IWP experience was so worth it. I trusted Ashley a lot before, but this experience heightened that so much. (Lisa, 40's)

I gained a new appreciation for myself as a mother. Also a great appreciation for our therapist because she really knows us and was pretty much spot on with how we would react and answer questions. She was also spot on with how we would feel. It is great to know that she is on the same page with us. It shows how important we are to her and how important it is to her to take the time to really listen to us. This experience showed us that she really is the right person for us. (Jessica, 30's)

The way that Sara portrayed us was just very kind, comfortable, and easygoing. It didn't seem contrived. It just was easy. Seeing myself being portrayed, I thought to myself, I am very acceptable! I really liked myself as Sara portrayed me. But, because it wasn't me, I was free from my usual self-judgement. I didn't worry about what I looked like or whether I said things the wrong way. Because it wasn't me, I could just soak it all in. I remember saying to myself as I was watching the Act II, "Wow! I really like myself. That's how people see me!" And so I accepted the fact that I am likeable! In fact, I'm even pleasant! [laughter]. As a result of seeing ourselves from the outside, somehow we've been elevated to something that we didn't realize we were or thought we were prior to this experience. When Payton and I left, we both felt very uplifted by the experience. On the way out the door, we said to ourselves, "We just really might be that awesome!" In that moment, I knew that I was going to be okay and more importantly, I knew that my daughter would really be okay Payton. In fact, Payton has made some very profound changes in her life that I credit to this experience. (Nicki, 40's)

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