

LIFE STORIES OF FREQUENT GEOGRAPHICAL RELOCATION  
DURING CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

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By

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## Abstract

This study focused on the process of frequent geographical relocation during childhood and adolescence. Three adult women contributed to this study providing retrospective accounts of their experiences with frequent relocation within Canada. As a group, relocations occurred between 4 and 10 cities, between 8 and 13 schools, between 2 and 4 provinces, and between Canada and Germany. Based theoretically on narrative theory, supported by a social constructionist epistemology, this study used life history interviews to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, the meanings they derived from them, and their interpretation of causal links amongst elements surrounding relocation. Through the use of narrative analysis, as proposed by Polkinghorne (1995), individual life stories were created for each of the three women who participated in this study. Their stories highlight the complexity of the process of repeated exits and entries into distinct schools, communities, and peer groups. They illustrate the multiplicity of experiences the participants coped with and the many meanings they derived from their relocation experiences. Furthermore, the stories provide causal explanations to short and long-term changes that occurred in their lives as a result of their experiences.

Providing support to other reports in the literature, these women described their experiences of fear, anxiety, anger, pain, sadness, and identity loss. Some positive experiences were excitement about change, enjoyment and appreciation of new possibilities, and hope for the future. The three participants connected many factors together in explaining changes in their lives, including family life, personal factors, historical and financial elements, social and environmental context, as well as factors

related to their experiences with relocation. Although many different meanings were created at different times, all participants commented on their loss of not having a childhood friend, and on their perception of the value of stability in their lives. Five different focal points emerged as helpful in the interpretation of the narratives: family support and the experience of self-worth; person-environment fit and the experiences of self and belonging; academic ability, social skills, and school environment, as they relate to school adaptation; timing of geographical mobility; and, adjustment-stability cycles in the context of repeated geographical relocation. Implications for support providers and future research are provided.

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To my husband and children, thank you for being you. I am grateful for all the laughter, love, and light that you bring into my life.

Dedication

In memory of my father

Propicio de Pina (1929–2006)

Whose integrity and passion for knowledge continue to inspire me.

And

To my children

Marina and Tiago

Who have changed my life story in so many wonderful ways.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Every study is nestled in a context from which research questions arise. At times, researchers develop a study because of an opportunity that has presented itself; sometimes the questions arise after careful observation of one's work or one's problems; or, sometimes, it is the curiosity of the researcher that leads to the development of a study. In this introduction, I share with the reader the personal and academic context in which this study was developed, and I situate the purpose of the study in relation to gaps in the current literature on geographical relocation.

### *Personal and Academic Context*

My role as a researcher was created within current academic practices, which require many graduate students to complete a thesis. As such, even prior to entering my graduate program, I searched for ideas, opportunities, and experiences from which I could delineate my own research interests. Drawing from my various roles in life, such as counselling student, mother, wife, immigrant, and other roles, my interests were varied; however, my focus on child and adolescent experiences remained consistent.

When the possibility of relocation came upon me suddenly during my graduate program, I was faced directly with questions for which I could find no definite answers in the literature I searched. My husband had been offered a sudden and appealing opportunity to carry on his profession in another province, and this profession would require future relocations throughout the country. This opportunity brought upon us a lot of questions about the impact and process of relocation on each individual in the family, and on our family life. As parents, we were especially concerned about the adaptation process of our children, because they would have to face repeated changes of school, friends, and neighbourhoods.

This was not the first time I was presented with the option of relocation in my life. As it was, a decade earlier, I had crossed the equator and headed North to immigrate permanently to Canada. In fact, even before my immigration experience, I had moved alone for shorter periods of time, and had lived previously in Canada for one year as a high school student, then in two separate cities for different lengths of time in my own home country, Brazil, for educational purposes. I was definitely not a stranger to the adventurous world of travel. Somehow, I have to admit, this time around I felt less confident of the benefits of relocation.

As my personal life interfaced my academic pursuit, I investigated the possibility of researching the process of multiple geographical relocations, with a focus on the experiences of children and adolescents. Immersed in a graduate program that supported many forms of qualitative studies, with a strong narrative theory influence, I combined my personal and academic contexts within one research study, using personal narratives to illuminate the topic of repeated geographical mobility.

### *Research Background*

Research on geographical relocation has widely focused on the impact of frequent geographical mobility on the lives of those who are faced with the need to relocate. Current literature suggests that the impact of geographical mobility is mediated by many different variables related to the mobility itself, the person moving, the environment, the context, and other factors surrounding the move. Research has been based on positivist assumptions, and has used quantitative methods to correlate variables thought to be connected with relocation, providing mixed findings. In addition, many studies failed to obtain reports directly from the children or adolescents, and the focus tended to be on the negative impact of mobility. There is a need for an emic contribution to the study of geographical mobility, and an investigative process that allows for a discussion of possible positive experiences related to relocation.

While research literature has recognized different types of relocation (e.g., short distance versus long distance, single relocation versus multiple relocations, optional versus forced relocation), the cumulative effect and experience of repeated relocation is still under-explored, especially with respect to the less obvious nomads, those moving within national grounds. Thus far, long-term implications of multiple relocations have been studied only in relation to international or military mobility. In addition, there is a lack of studies examining the multiple meanings that children and adolescents derive from the events that take place in their lives as they are required to move from one place to another.

Despite all the research currently available, there is a lack of understanding of the entire process of adaptation, involving the person, the family, the school, the community, and the broader social context of the move. Even the broadest studies, those attempting to incorporate different variables related to mobility and several dependent variables assumed to be impacted by mobility, fail to provide a picture of relocation as a continuous process.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

How do children and adolescents experience the relocation process? How do they experience the continuous need to relocate, having to exit and enter different schools and communities several times between kindergarten and high school? What is experienced as supportive or challenging during the adaptation process, and how do they cope with the different elements surrounding relocation? What do they gain and learn from their experiences, and what meanings do they derive from them?

The purpose of this research was to expand the literature by exploring the process of repeated geographical relocation as experienced by children and adolescents. The study was concerned with contemporary nomads and their experiences of multiple geographical mobility, with the meanings they derived from their various relocation experiences, and with their

interpretations of the relationships between frequent relocations and other events that took place in their lives as they adjusted to each new environment.

This research fills several gaps in the research literature. It provides a broader understanding of mobility by focusing on the entire process of repeated relocation. It also provides an emic dimension to the study of the lives of those who experienced repeated geographical relocation during childhood and adolescence using a different methodology. In addition, it examines the short- and long-term meanings derived from the frequent relocations, as well as interpretations of the short- and long-term impact of frequent mobility in the lives of the participants.

Because the literature on international and military relocations has explored many aspects of a nomadic lifestyle, including the role of the sponsoring organizations for the relocating families (e.g., “Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds”, or “Military Brats and Other Global Nomads: Growing Up in Organization Families”), I have chosen to focus on the less recognized needs of children relocating within national boundaries.

This study used retrospective accounts of life experiences to develop stories of repeated geographical relocation. Through these stories, the temporal aspect of adapting to frequent relocation is highlighted, informing readers of all events of significance surrounding mobility in the lives of these contemporary nomads, as they repeatedly entered and exited distinct schools, communities, and peer groups. Because the stories cover the childhood and adolescent years of the adult participant, these three aspects of relocation - experience, interpretation of causality, and meaning - were explored as they appeared to the participants in different periods of their lives, up until the moment of their participation in this study, as they continued to make meaning of all past transitions and experiences.

### *Explanation of Terms*

Nomad is the term used to refer to “one of a race or tribe that has no fixed location, but wanders from place to place in search of pasture or game” (<http://www.webster-dictionary.net/>). Contemporary, in the same dictionary, is defined as “living, occurring, or existing at the same time; done in, or belonging to the same times; contemporaneous”. The term *contemporary nomads*, therefore, is used in this study in very general terms to refer to individuals who have experienced a nomadic lifestyle, moving from place to place, not necessarily in search of pasture or games, but who have moved as a result of their caregivers’ need or desire to move. The individuals are those included in previous studies reviewed in the next chapter of this thesis, dating back five decades ago, and those who contributed with the completion of this research.

*Repeated geographical relocation* and *repeated geographical mobility* are terms frequently used in this study to refer to this nomadic lifestyle. Other terms such as *multiple* or *frequent* are also used to refer to the repetitive nature of the relocations. These terms are used in this study to designate any change of residence that brings about the lack of familiarity in living day to day in a new environment. Although residential mobility might be defined as a move to another house that is located within the same neighbourhood, allowing children to continue attending the same school, and the caregivers to continue using the same neighbourhood food market, it can also include those moves to another house in a different neighbourhood, requiring children to attend a different school, but allowing the family to continue seeing the same family doctor. In the first case, there is mobility with familiarity; in the second there is mobility with some familiarity. I am interested in the processes of adaptation to a new environment where a family is faced with the task of becoming familiar with most services, people, and customs of the new community.

### *Organization*

In the following pages the reader will encounter a review of the literature on mobility of several types (e.g., school transfers, international mobility, military mobility), followed by a detailed explanation of how this study contributes to the literature on this topic. Chapter Three contains a description of the methodology, including a detailed explanation of the procedures used to answer the questions regarding the experiences, impact, and meanings of multiple geographical relocations.

Central to this thesis are the stories the reader will encounter in Chapter Four, which provide a contextualized perspective of the process of relocation adaptation, along with the many elements related to the participants' experiences, their interpretation of causal links, and the meanings they derived from their experiences. Chapter Five contains a description of the interview context from which each narrative was created, along with the researcher's interpretation of the narratives, connecting them to previous reports in the literature. The final chapter is a condensation of the interpretations offered in this study along with the implications this study has both for practice and for future research.



## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

The concern about geographical mobility stems partially from theories that postulate the self develops in the context of the wider social context. G. H. Mead (1934) theorized that the self is a social structure that develops as it responds to the attitudes of others toward the self and toward larger phases of the social process. Erikson's (1973) developmental theory suggested that a stable social environment provides the growing ego with the feeling of sameness and continuity with one's past that is needed to support integration of one's abilities and identifications. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory suggested that the biological and psychological characteristics of each individual interact with the immediate physical and social environment, as well as with elements of the larger community and society, including values and beliefs, so that changes in one element or sphere affect the development of other parts of the system, consequently impacting the development of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

A visit to a local library can help families, educators, and caregivers become familiar with current views of the impact of relocation on children and adolescents. A variety of books are available addressing issues of fears associated with impending moves (e.g., *I'm not moving, Mama*, by Nancy Carlstrom), anxiety about enrolling in a new school (e.g., *Starting School With an Enemy*, by Elisa Carbone), anger related to leaving friends and customary activities behind (e.g., *The Year My Parents Ruined My Life*, by Martha Freeman), loneliness prior to establishing new friendships (e.g., *Hawk Hill*, by Suzie Gilbert), and many more topics related to relocation adjustment.

Within psychology, searches under the heading *geographical mobility* revealed hundreds of articles related to military families, corporate families, international relocation, spouse's adaptation, school achievement, personality factors mediating impact of mobility, well-being, impact on the self, and various other themes and issues related to mobility. Despite the differing

perspectives taken by the various researchers and professionals serving relocated families, the authors in general agree that geographical mobility is a stressful event (Finkel, 2001; Humke & Schaefer, 1995; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982). There is less consensus, however, with respect to the nature of the impact and its magnitude on those experiencing the move, whether it be across a city, across borders within a country, or to distant lands across the oceans.

Because this study is concerned with the experience, meaning, and the entire process of multiple relocations during childhood, I highlight in this literature review relevant research related to these aspects of mobility. I begin this review by covering what has been reported about the experience and meaning of relocation to bring the reader closer to the personal world of contemporary nomads. Next, I present a plethora of studies related to the impact of mobility. As the research in this area is so wide ranging, I organized it in two parts. The first, Adjustment Outcome Measures, is a collection of general statements offered in the literature regarding causal links between mobility and several outcome measures. The second, Variables Mediating the Impact of Mobility, offers a more detailed report of findings, organized according to the mediating variable linking mobility to children's outcomes. This is the longest section of this review. Finally, under the heading The Process of Relocation and Related Theoretical Models, I describe three models developed by scholars in different fields that can be useful in understanding the process of geographical mobility.

### *The Experience and Meaning of Relocation*

Quoting Dr. Marc Fried from the Center for Community Studies, Massachusetts General Hospital, Toffler (1970) described the reactions to geographical relocation as “expressions of grief”, “strikingly similar to mourning for a lost person” (p. 80). Movers experience painful loss, depression, prolonged longing, symptoms of psychosocial distress, physical ailments, helplessness, anger, and a tendency to idealize the lost place. Matter and Matter (1988) stated

that young children, similar to adults, experience feelings of loneliness, apprehension, grief, anger, and homesickness. Aisenstein (1988), based on her clinical experience treating international employees and their children, concurred with these reports. According to Aisenstein, “the encounter with the new culture produces stress, loneliness, and a feeling of loss, often with unresolved mourning” (p. 46).

Similarly, grief and loss are also the basis of a study by Allan and Bardsley (1983). Their working hypothesis was that moving is an experience of loss for a child, similar to the experience of death and grief. For children, these feelings of loss are experienced at times as hurt, sadness, anger, and possible aloof detachment. The researchers conducted group sessions with six grade three students, who had recently moved to a new community, to create opportunity for disclosure through discussions and drawings. The researchers prompted children to explore their views on getting to know each other, moving, becoming familiar with their school, getting to know classmates, sharing feelings, and accepting changes. On the basis of the children’s responses, the authors concluded that moving is an experience of loss.

In another study, Allan and Anderson (1986) observed that children often identified moving as an example of a crisis situation. The children in their study associated moving with feelings of hurt about leaving friends, grandparents, pets, and a favourite house, feelings of anger at parents, and fear of going to a new school.

An interesting factor observed in the literature is that parents’ stress reaction to relocation is greatly influenced by their concerns about the losses their children suffer as a result of relocation, and concerns about their adaptation to a new school (Munton, 1990). In fact, it has been proposed that corporate problems with internationally relocated employees stem partially from their employees’ children’s adjustment difficulties (Richards, Donohue, & Gullota, 1985).

Sinetar (1986), an organizational psychologist, used the term *relo shock* to refer to the collection of symptoms associated with the emotional disorientation of corporate employees resulting from relocation and the experience of being in an unfamiliar surrounding. The term encompasses symptoms of confusion, lethargy, more serious physical ailments, or simply “the blues”. In addition, isolation and identity loss have been identified as common experiences among members of military families (Litwack & Foster, 1981) and among civilian migrants in the United States (Stein, 1984).

According to Stein (1984), patients speak of their experiences of isolation and identity loss by using recurring terms to describe themselves, such as “misplaced persons”, “stranded”, “like a fish out of water”, and “isolated” (p.275). Stein added,

one’s sense of identity often encompasses a sense of place – where one ‘belongs’, to whom and to what one is ‘linked’. The boundaries of the self are defined by a psycho-geography of place. Uprooted from these, one may well have a lucrative, even stable job, but feel as though one has gained the world but lost the soul...These people not only feel out of their element, but are painfully aware that something is missing. It is as though the “element” from which they are parted is felt to be a part of themselves that they no longer have or feel that it was torn from them. The environment which had completed the very boundaries of their selves is no longer present. Their sense of “alienation” follows from a nagging feeling of uncanniness, if not an overwhelming feeling of depersonalization, for they truly do not know any longer who they are. (pp. 274-275)

Although it appears that moving is associated only with depressed affect and other negative feelings, more than 50 per cent of a small sample (n=17) of adolescents (ages 14-16) taking part in a study of relocation stress indicated that they felt excited about the move (Puskar & Ladeley, 1992). Feelings of ambivalence, anger, and loneliness were also reported, but it is important to keep in mind that relocation can be associated with a positive experience, such as observed by Shaw (1979), who asserted that military children often felt excited about a move, and boys saw moves as important for the family.

Pollock and Reken (2003) highlighted this positive perspective. They indicated that, although there are challenges inherent to the nomadic lifestyle, many children growing up with cross-cultural experiences may develop an expanded world view, become highly adaptable individuals, be more understanding and accepting of other cultures, be more willing and able to take advantage of present opportunities, among other enriching characteristics.

Despite the growing interest in the field of meaning generation within psychology (Bruner, 1990; Gergen & Kaye, 1992; Hermans, 1999), no study to date has addressed the meaning individuals generate from their childhood experiences of living with multiple relocations. The only partially related study (Buerkle, 1997), investigating the meaning and impact of residential mobility, did not obtain information directly from the children, and meaning exploration was more akin to the first level changes in affect and environment (e.g., families experienced mobility as a stressful event, or families were faced with the continuing struggle to find proper housing), than to the realizations of changes in deeply rooted beliefs about the self, values, and rules of conduct in relation to others and life in general (e.g., I knew I would always be able to count on my mother, or I realized I could cope with anything).

Meaning has to do with changes in assumptions about the world, psychological and social redefinitions of the self, and finding significance in the experienced transition (Neimeyer, 2000). Because the experience of relocation has been closely linked to the experience of grieving the loss of a loved one, and children do cope with multiple and repeated losses as they relocate frequently, the following words come to mind: “the attempt to reconstruct a world of meaning is the central process in the experience of grieving” (Neimeyer, p.83).

### *The Impact of Relocation*

The impact of mobility on children has been studied in relation to academic achievement and many forms of psychosocial adjustment indicators such as self-concept, relationships, and

mental health. As previously indicated, the nature and impact of mobility on these aspects of well-being are difficult to assess in face of the diverse findings in the literature.

Finkel (2001) reported several factors that, according to Shaw, influence a military child's adjustment to relocation, namely the degree of identification with the military, the intrinsic adaptive capacities of the family, a child's personality, psychosocial development, and a child's coping skills. Similarly, Shaw and Pangman (1975) concluded that family relocation is neither intrinsically good nor bad, with adjustment being dependent on the combination of a child's psychosocial development, past experiences, the family, and social forces surrounding the event. Based on the literature, Humke and Schaefer (1995) concluded that parental attitude towards a move, especially the mother's attitude, along with family disruptions initiating mobility, number and distance of the move, as well as the presence of other stressors, all contribute to a child's psychosocial and educational adjustment following relocation.

In a review of the literature on corporate families and mobility, Richards, Donohue, and Gullotta (1985) suggested that the impact of relocation is mediated by the age of the children, the career stage of the husband (the corporate employee), the meaning ascribed to the move, availability of social support available in the community and the corporation, and coping resources of the family. They summarised general findings from the fields of psychology and sociology as follows:

1. women and children experience a temporary period of disruption and disorganization during the relocation process (Jones, 1973; Margolis, 1979; McAllister, Mutler, & Kaiser, 1973; Marshall & Cooper, 1976; Seidenberg, 1973);
2. the inability to adopt to the stresses and changes created by relocation can be linked to depression among women (Weisman & Paykel, 1972; Weiss, 1969; Seidenberg, 1973);
3. the immediate and cumulative effect of stress on parents has deleterious effects on children (Donohue, Gullotta & Stevens, 1982; Gullotta & Donohue, 1981b; Margolis, 1979; Seidenberg, 1973);
4. relocation to a new community has considerable emotional impact on women (Gaylord, 1979; Gowler & Legge, 1975; Viney & Bazeley, 1977). (p. 69)

Studies of the impact of relocation on children have been largely dominated by a quantitative methodology, and many of them obtained information about children's adjustment from parents or teachers. The most ambitious studies attempted to use control variables such as social economic status, family structure, age, number of moves, recency of move, distance from former residence to present home, and many other controls in different combinations, according to the possibilities presented by the sample. Although many of the findings are qualified by interactions of mobility with other factors, some general findings have been proposed in the literature.

#### *Adjustment Outcome Measures*

Researchers have directed their attention to several domains of adjustment thought to be affected by relocation. Although many of the findings have been qualified by mediating variables, as expressed earlier, I have grouped some general findings according to three domains of adjustment: psychosocial, family, and school domains.

*Psychosocial adjustment.* Nearly four decades ago, Toffler (1970) wrote about the overwhelming changes occurring in contemporary societies and their impact on human experiences. The concept of transience is of central importance in his analysis because it is a defining characteristic of modern world experiences. "Transience", he wrote, "is the new 'temporariness' in everyday life. It results in a mood, a feeling of impermanence" (p. 42). Toffler postulated that, in contrast to earlier generations, modern society is moving towards an ever increasing level of transience, which was reflected in shortened relationships with others, things, ideas, places, and organizational structures. He stated that, "it is this abbreviation, this compression, that gives rise to the almost tangible feeling that we live, rootless and uncertain, among shifting dunes" (p. 43); "it is this fast through-put, combined with increasing newness and

complexity in the environment, that strains the capacity to adapt and creates the danger of future shock” (p.44).

For Toffler, mobility was one of the examples of transience in our society. Especially among highly mobile groups, this transience leads to a lack of commitment to communities and local institutions and organizations. As Toffler illustrated, “... an airline executive is quoted as saying he avoids involvement in the political life of his community because ‘in a few years I won’t even be living here. You plant a tree and you never see it grow’” (p.82). According to Pinder (1989), Vance Packard has also espoused this same argument: mobility inhibits commitment. In his study of the effects of frequent mobility in corporate families, Pinder quoted the wife of a 44-year-old oil-company employee, who had moved eight times in 20 years: “I think it is very difficult for children and adults to really let go, to try to completely settle in socially, and to decorate and establish a new home when they know it is temporary” (p.53). Furthermore, a further question exists about the commitment generated to employers brought about by multiple transfers. Although Pinder suggested that the negative impact of mobility on the lives of corporate families alienates employees from their corporations, Edstrom and Galbraith (1977) asserted that frequent moves served the purpose of building commitment to the organization.

The issue of commitment to those generating the transfers raises the question about how children perceive these changes. Are they a result of the parent’s decision, or do they reflect the needs of the corporation? Whatever the impact of mobility on commitment, whether positive or negative, what kind of commitment changes do children experience with regards to parents, family, friends, organizations, and community as a whole? Jennings (1967) suggested that mobility promotes family dependence as the result of the family being the only secure refuge in frequently changing environments. On the other hand, Pinder (1989) observed cases in which



family break up was the result of high mobility. The impact of mobility on families will be discussed later in this review.

DeWitt (1998), after adjusting for potential confounds, observed that the use of illicit drugs (i.e., marijuana, hallucinogens, crack/cocaine) at an early age is more likely to occur among movers than non-movers. Barret and Noble (1973) reported that 81 per cent of parents in their study found that mobility had either no impact or a positive impact on their children's emotional well-being, while six per cent observed mixed emotional effects, and 13 per cent reported negative effects. In one of two of their studies, Stroh and Brett (1990b) obtained no significant differences between maternal reports of short-term adjustment of children who moved compared to those who had not moved during the study. In another study, however, Stroh and Brett (1990a) indicated that children who had relocated in the past three months had fewer best friends, spent less time with male friends and less time in sports, and took fewer lessons, and read less for pleasure than they did prior to moving. In another study, Vernberg (1990) concluded that the findings indicated that peer relations are more difficult for the mobile adolescent.

In the social domain, children experiencing mobility may suffer diminished quality in relationships (Lagrone, 1978; Long, 1986), adolescents appear less capable and less interested in forming social ties (Douvan & Adelson, 1966), children experiencing multiple moves experience difficulty relinquishing old friendships and establishing new ones (Brett, 1982), mobile adolescents often experience feelings of marginality and lack of belonging (Goldberg, 1980), and many adolescents appear to develop a broader perspective toward other peoples and cultures (Darnauer, 1976). According to Finkel (2001), in other domains of psychosocial adjustment, Leitzel, Charlton and Jeffreys indicated that while the majority of adolescents find relocation a stressful and predominantly negative experience, a minority of them appreciate the opportunity

to start over and redefine themselves in a new social setting. In addition, Werkman, Farley, Butler, and Quayhagen (1981) have reported findings suggesting that adolescents who experienced international relocation report a less positive self-concept and see independence and self-knowledge as their greatest strength, as opposed to interpersonal skills.

*Family adjustment.* For children, relocation involves the family unit. No matter what the composition of the family unit, the child will always be exposed to the changes observed and felt by the other members of the family. Mother, father, or siblings will each have a different reaction and different intensities of emotions and concerns resulting from the relocation.

A national survey in the United States dealing with school programs for newcomers reported that counsellor and psychologists responding to the survey, in addition to helping children with peer relations and school adaptation following a move, were also involved with individual needs of these children as a result of family changes (Cornille, Bayer, & Smith, 1983). Although the study did not specify if these changes were related to relocation, examples of family concerns were death in the family, new siblings, long-distance marriage, and changes in marital status. Although many children and adults experience mobility as a stressful event, the move itself may at times be just a small part of the issues challenging the family unit and the individuals within it.

Pinder (1989) observed that relocation affected families in different ways. In some cases, the transferred parent, either with or without the spouse, may relocate alone leaving children behind, seeing them only when time or finances permit. In other cases, parents and children move together leaving their extended family behind. In addition to family separation, half of Pinder's participants reported that relocation can also benefit marital relationships. Pinder suggested that couples may come closer together as they struggle with the common goal of overcoming the challenges associated with relocation. That being said, more than 20 per cent of

marriages in his sample reported marital difficulties arising from the relocation. Pinder (1989) hypothesized that a combination of three factors can negatively affect a marriage during relocation, at times even to the point of separation: “(1) a sudden and unprecedented call to transfer late in one’s career, (2) a degree of existing marital discord before the transfer, and (3) a spouse’s forced resignation from a desired job as a result of the employee’s transfer” (p.55).

Diminished parental availability due to symptoms associated with relocation is a phenomenon often observed in the literature (Aisenstein, 1988; Beem & Prah, 1984; Holland-Jacobsen, Holland, & Cook, 1984; Matter & Matter, 1988). Buerkle (1997), based on several studies, reported that many families are unable to provide children with a stable and consistent environment conducive to children’s well-being during relocation. The studies reviewed by Buerkle suggest that children react to parental stress symptoms, and that they experience decreased availability of support due to loss of social ties, and/or parental unavailability and stress. The author indicates that in the case of single-parents, poor, ‘high-risk’ families, mobility is often a result of poor housing conditions, unpaid bills, evictions, or violence, while families of higher social economic status move to improve quality of life by upgrading living environment or by moving closer to social support.

In a psychodynamic analysis of parent-child relationship during international relocation, Aisenstein (1988) proposed that infants may develop a symbiotic relationship with mothers, and they may react with depression when their mothers become depressed as a result of relocation. In early childhood, disruption of maternal support affects children’s object relations, leading to low investment in relationships, inability to fantasize, poor control of hostility, poor goal orientation, poor competency, and poor mastery skills. During early school years, according to Aisenstein, children are highly adaptable, and therefore, in a foreign environment, parents may resent the visible changes in the children, or rely on them as guides of the new culture, putting children in a

parental role. As for adolescents, depending on earlier development and their experiences of loss during previous relocations, they may experience difficulty forming long-term friendships or love relationships.

*School adjustment.* The school-age child spends much time in school, and therefore, any consideration of relocation needs must take into account the process of adaptation to a new school environment. With any school change, among all the losses the child experiences, there is also the loss of important others associated with the previous school (Matter & Matter, 1988). Counselling articles directed at helping newcomers adjust to a new school often cite the need to acknowledge the multiple losses these children are facing as they enter a new school (Dowd, 1987; Matter & Matter, 1988; Strother & Harvill, 1986). Holland-Jacobsen, Holland, and Cook (1984) also noted that although many people have challenges to overcome as a result of relocation, children and adolescents are especially vulnerable because they are usually involuntary participants in the migration process. In addition to helping children as they enter the new school, it has also been suggested that counsellors should attempt to help children as they prepare to leave their current school (Splete & Rasmussen, 1977). Dowd (1987) briefly hints at the need to help those staying behind when she encouraged students to keep in touch with old friends through letters, phone calls, and if possible, visits, stating that this strategy is beneficial to both those staying behind and to the child moving away.

Matter and Matter (1988) suggested that young children, lacking the ability to verbalize their feelings, need help exploring all the emotions surrounding the impending or recent move. For a younger child, stability can be critical, and therefore a child needs to be exposed to all the rules and procedures in a new school and on the playground. Furthermore, they indicate that children can benefit from being introduced gradually to the new environment, so that they will not be overwhelmed by the several changes all at once.

Holland-Jacobsen, Holland, and Cook (1984) referred to the literature when describing the needs of children upon entering a new school: finding an acceptable place among their new peers; meeting academic and behavioural standards for their new school; and being accepted as an appropriate member of the assigned class. Strother and Harvill (1986), based on their experience as school counsellors, developed a support group model for relocated adolescents that focuses on providing information (e.g., location of cafeteria, library, and offices, school policies, schedules), exploring emotions, developing skills in making friends, and developing a support group. An even more comprehensive approach to help adolescent students adjust to a new school is the one described by Wilson (1993). This program involves helping students to obtain information about the school and the community, to pursue personal interests within and outside the school, to meet members of the staff who can provide more detailed information to the adolescent (athletic director, librarian, career centre staff member), and to have support from the group as needed.

Dowd (1987), in a review of programs for aiding mobile children, identified several focal points for meeting students' needs: improving lines of communication between family and school to meet social and emotional needs; ensuring parent involvement, staff development, student assessment, and development of learning centres to address academic needs; and educating parents and teachers on how to help students cope with feelings and behavioural changes associated with the stress of relocation.

Cornille, Bayer, and Smyth (1983) obtained information about students' needs from 552 public middle-school systems across the United States, as well as information about problems schools face in helping new students and programs offered to enhance adjustment of newcomers. The most commonly reported need of students was the establishment of a social network in school and in the neighbourhood. School adaptation, according to respondents, required new

students to learn how to get around the school (finding new classes, lockers, buses, and the gym), and to become adjusted to new teachers and to new and often different academic expectations and programs. Respondents also indicated that individual needs related to changes in the family and the need to develop a sense of belonging in the new community were important issues to be addressed when helping newcomers.

According to Cornille, Bayer, and Smyth (1983), respondents, most of whom were counsellors and psychologists, reported difficulty compiling academic records from previous school, planning based on the school census, addressing academic deficiencies of newcomers, and addressing the variation in academic programs. According to these support providers, students most prone to experiencing adjustment difficulty are those who are too big or too small for their age, have a physical handicap, have poor self-concept, are older or younger than their classmates, are undergoing major economic shifts, have poor social skills, require special academic attention (e.g., are brighter or slower, have a learning disability, come from a less demanding academic program), or have a different cultural background. Procedures and services provided to newcomers are usually directed at meeting the requirements of schools, such as immunization records, or placement information (psychometric tests, academic records), while services addressing the socio-emotional concerns of students are given less priority.

From the perspective of the student, Pinder (1989) quoted one of his participants who reflected on her experiences of relocation as a child:

As I moved so much as a child by my father's company, I have one thing to say [that] I feel very strongly about. Moving as a teenager was a terrible experience. It was disastrous to my education, [with] new schools, new friends to be made, [and] no two schools wanting to give the same credits. When an employee reaches a stage in his or her life when his children are in high school, I don't think he should be transferred – or have it held against him if he refuses a transfer at this time in his and his family's lives. (p.54)

As seen thus far, scholars have offered many propositions to account for the impact of mobility on children and families. However, mobility is always set within a particular context, and different parts of this context interact in various ways, leading to diverse outcomes. In the following section I consider the various factors that mediate the relationship between mobility and adjustment measures.

#### *Variables Mediating the Impact of Mobility*

There is some suggestion that patterns of rates and distance of relocation are associated with socio-economic status of families. Data from the 1970 U.S. Bureau of Census Reports indicated that American members of higher socio-economic groups tended to move further from their homes compared to members of lower socio-economic groups (Kroger, 1980b).

Data from a pilot study conducted in New Zealand, however, suggested that adolescents with a lower social-economic status tend to move more frequently and further away from their homes (Kroger, 1980b). In addition, family structure was also correlated with number of moves, with dual-parent families moving significantly less frequently than non-intact families. There was also some indication that non-Europeans in this study traveled more than families of European background.

Mobility rate has been further associated with children's developmental stage and interestingly with intelligence. Goebel (1981) reported that highly intelligent adolescents, and adolescents with higher social-economic status, reported a pattern of high rates of mobility during preschool years followed by lower rates during adolescence. Mobility rates in Australia are found to be higher among renters, those who are younger in age, those with lower income, and those without children (Hassan, Zang, & McDonnell-Baum, 1996). These observations highlight the differing contexts preceding relocation, and the possible concomitant family needs associated with these factors.

Some studies of the impact of mobility have investigated the roles of support, personality, and prior adjustment. Difficulty staying in touch with former friends following a move was a significant predictor of nearly lethal suicide attempts among youth and young adults in the study by Potter et al. (2001). Personality was investigated in an adult population, producing no significant relationship between personality and geographic mobility, or between any of the personality scales (achievement, affiliation, autonomy, change, cognitive structure, exhibition, play, and desirability) and the presence of various psychiatric symptoms (Pihl & Caron, 1980). In a study of older women, neuroticism and openness to experience predicted higher reports of depressive symptoms following community relocation, and extraversion and openness predicted increases in self-esteem (Kling, Ryff, Love, & Essex, 2003).

Children's well-being following mobility is highly related to prior adjustment. According to Stroh and Brett (1990b), the best predictor of adjustment following a move was a child's adjustment 18 months prior to the move. In another study by the same authors (1990a), following a move, children tended to maintain similar attitudes towards moves, school, and neighbourhood (except in cases of maternal poor adjustment). In addition, children tended to maintain a similar lifestyle after a move, such as maintaining similar number of friends and engaging in similar number of activities. As for academic achievement, Temple and Reynolds (1999) investigated math and reading achievement of inner city youth in high poverty neighbourhoods. They observed that although those students who moved frequently between kindergarten and grade seven performed about one year behind compared with those who did not move, only half of the difference appears to be attributable to mobility, with remaining portion being due to pre-existing differences.

In a large study of elementary school students in London, Strand (2002) observed that children who moved in early school years obtained significantly lower scores in achievement



(reading, writing, and mathematics) at age seven compared with those who did not move; however, this difference was dramatically reduced when controlling for pre-existing group differences, such as social economic status, special language needs, special educational needs, and absence rates. When using controls, the only significant correlation with mobility was that of mathematics achievement scores, but this was described as being relatively small compared with the impact of the other factors differentiating the two groups.

In another study in the United States, with 764 grade six students, Heinlein and Shinn (2000) observed that effects of mobility on grade six mathematics and reading achievement scores were observable only when there was no statistical control for achievement in grade three. Blane, Pilling, and Fogelman (1985) obtained similar results with older students in England, Scotland, and Wales, with differences in the academic achievement between mobile and non-mobile children being largely explained by pre-existing differences.

As there is much inconsistency in the findings regarding the role of several variables related to the experience of mobility, I have highlighted these discrepancies by grouping current findings according to the mediating roles of variables that have obtained special attention in the literature.

*Number of moves.* Shaw (1979) compared the self-concept of 56 military adolescents according to frequency of moves, separating them into two groups, those who moved four or fewer times (average of 2.1 moves) and those who moved five or more times (average 9.5 moves). The adolescents in the high move group, besides describing moves as more important, easier, and more exciting, they also perceived themselves more negatively than those who moved less often. Adolescents in the high mobility group described themselves as more unimportant, colourless, changeable, boring, distant, pessimistic, low, more complaining, and somewhat more withdrawn and unhappy. Also, they perceived themselves to be more insecure, less intimate,

more inconsistent, and more critical. These adolescents appeared more comfortable with feelings of loneliness, rating it as less distant and more intimate; they saw restlessness as more negative in various dimensions; and they regarded intimacy as less stable, more important, and dangerous, compared to adolescents in the low mobility group. With regards to solitude, Kroger (1980b), in a pilot study, observed an increased capacity to cope with solitude with higher number of moves, with high mobility participants in her study rating solitude in a more positive light.

Kroger (1980a), however, did not obtain significant relationship between number of moves and ratings of self-acceptance in her study of 136 middle-class adolescents (controlling for family cohesion and sex). In another study of three dimensions of self-concept, namely mastery, self-esteem, and self-denigration, Hendershott (1989) found no relationship between number of moves and either self-esteem or self-denigration. However, number of moves appeared to present a moderate relationship with mastery, with those who moved three or four times regarding their lives significantly more within their control compared to those moving less often or those who moved more than five times. The negative relationship between mobility and mastery reports in the low mobility group (one or two moves) is dependent on the recency of the move, with those having moved more recently reporting less control over their lives compared to other groups of mobility or those having moved longer ago. Recency of move also interacted with rates of mobility for those moving more than five times. Those in the high mobility group, who had also moved more recently, tended to hold more negative attitude towards themselves (self-denigration) compared to those who moved less or moved longer ago.

Despite some observable variation, prevalence rates of drug use and drug-related problems appeared to increase steadily with number of moves (DeWitt, 1998). In another study, number of moves proved to be the only significant predictor of nearly lethal suicide attempts among adolescents and young adults (13-34 years of age), when simultaneously controlling for

recency of move, distance moved, difficulty staying in touch, depression, alcoholism, sex, and age (Potter et al., 2001). In military families, adolescents who were the most dissatisfied with the number of moves tended to have slightly fewer positive relationships with their parents, and to be more dissatisfied with the environment provided by the Air Force, with their life in the Air Force, and with their base location (Pittman & Bowen, 1994). Number of moves was also found to be related to negative perceptions of the impact of mobility among adults (Pihl & Caron, 1980), and Finkel (2001) did not find support for the hypothesis that number of moves predicts children's psychosocial adjustment.

With respect to school lives (measured by academic and behavioural adjustment), school mobility was associated with less than satisfactory school life, with adjustment problems increasing considerably with each successive move. However, if children lived with both biological parents, the effect of mobility was non-significant (Tucker, Marx, & Long, 1998). In the study by Neslon, Simoni, and Adelman (1996), multiple movers were less likely to be rated by teachers as above average in behaviour, and to be absent more often. Those children nominated by teachers as having a poor adjustment were more likely to have moved more often. Mobility groups, however, did not differ significantly in achievement or in rates of tardiness. In addition, Felner, Primavera, and Cauce (1981) observed no correlation between number of school transfers and absence rates, and Marchant and Medway (1987) found that mobility rate was not a significant predictor of school achievement for military children, or a significant predictor of well-being. They did, however, observe that a higher rate of mobility was associated with engagement in more activities compared to groups of lower mobility rate.

*Recency of move.* Several studies cited above also provide information about the effects of recency of move on individuals experiencing relocation. For example, Finkel (2001) found that as time in current residence increased, mothers tended to report fewer internalizing

behaviours for their children, and children tended to report less loneliness and better peer relations. Kroger (1980a) observed no relationship or meaningful pattern between recency of move and self-concept. On the other hand, risk of nearly lethal suicide attempts increased with recency of moves in the study by Potter et al. (2001). In their study of military adolescents, Pittman and Bowen (1994) suggested that recency of relocation is associated with greater dissatisfaction with mobility rate, which in turn is associated with poorer adjustment.

Hendershott (1989) observed no main effects of recency of move on measures of mastery over environment, self-esteem, and self-denigration. Recency did, however, as already indicated, mediate the effect of number of moves on measures of mastery over environment and self-denigration. In this study, recency of move was the only variable associated with depression, with higher levels of depressions reported by those who had moved within the 12 months prior to the study, compared to non-movers or to less recent movers.

In a study of students in grades three and four in 33 elementary schools, Wright (1999) observed that recency of move was not correlated with any of the achievement measures of reading or mathematics, nor was recency associated with academic or behavioural adjustment in the study by Tucker, Marx, and Long (1998). Furthermore, recency of move in military families was not associated with well-being, academic achievement, or social competence (Marchant & Medway, 1987).

*Type of move (Distance).* When families relocate, they may be faced with relatively small changes in surroundings, as in moves within the same neighbourhood, or they may be faced with several needs of adaptation, as when they move to a new city, or even a new province. Families can even move to different countries, distancing themselves even further from their previous surroundings.

Potter et al. (2001) observed that increased distance of move was significantly associated with nearly lethal suicide attempts among youth and young adults between 13 and 34 years of age. Toney, Pitcher, and Stinner (1985) investigated two measures of locus of control, outcome expectancy, and control ideology, in a group of older white males in relation to distance of migration. Although there was a trend towards those moving further away to report less control over the environment (believing certain behaviours had no effect on outcome, and believing in one's personal inability to perform certain behaviours thought to have an impact on outcome), the differences were not significant (Toney et al.).

In her study of 242 grade-eleven students, Kroger (1980a) observed that those moving greater distances reported significantly lower scores in a rating scale measuring self-acceptance. Kroger (1980b) also conducted a pilot study investigating the potential effect of some variables of mobility on adolescents' attitudes towards solitude, self, and others, as measured by eight sentence completion items. Having grouped the students according to how far their current home was from their previous residence, Kroger (1980b) observed a tendency for those students who had moved an intermediate distance to complete sentences regarding self and others in more positive terms, compared to those students who moved the furthest away and those who did not move very far. A significantly higher percentage of students moving medium-high distance compared to those not moving at all reported a more positive attitude towards parents, and those moving the furthest away used more positive sentences regarding solitude than those moving less far away.

Johnson and Lindblad (1991) obtained data suggesting that some types of mobility, namely intra-city mobility, was significantly associated with lower composite scores in achievement tests (reading, mathematics, and language arts). They indicated that even though the intra-city mobility group had higher rates of low income and minority group families, these

variables did not interact with the main effect of mobility type. Similarly, Wright (1999) observed that although the effect was minimal, low achievement scores were more associated with those students moving within the district, than with those not moving or moving outside the district. Distance of move was found to have a negative correlation with social competence, but no correlation with achievement or well-being (Marchant & Medway, 1987). On the other hand, Tucker et al. (1998) observed that those students moving further away increased the odds of having a more adjusted school life.

*Age of the child.* Considerable observations in the literature have been made regarding differences in the impact of mobility depending on the age of the child during relocation. Barret and Noble (1973) obtained reports from parents that indicated a negative outcome of mobility in 19 per cent of children over the age of 11, versus 6 per cent of children between the ages of six and ten. Brett (1982) observed that extent of mobility was related to the quality of peer relationships for children but not for adolescents. Stroh and Brett (1990b), however, observed no differences in adaptation to relocation between adolescents and younger children who moved during the course of the study.

Kroger (1980a) separated 114 adolescents into four different groups according to the age span in which they experienced the greatest number of moves (0-4 years, 5-8years, 9-12 years, and 13-17 years), and then compared their reports of self-acceptance. No significant differences occurred among the self-acceptance means over the four age spans. On the other hand, Calabrese (1989), in a study of alienation with 239 students between grades 10 and 12, observed two major findings related to age at the time of relocation: “one, moving early in life does not affect levels of alienation; two, the older the adolescent, the greater the effect that moving has on levels of alienation” (p.43). Pittman and Bowen (1994) also observed age differences in a study of adjustment among adolescents in military families. In terms of personal adjustment, older

adolescents in the military reported fewer feelings of boredom, loneliness, or fear, and greater life satisfaction when compared with younger adolescents.

Corporate families in Pinder's (1989) study reported that preschoolers are not usually affected by relocation unless the child has a mental or physical disability. On the other hand, the most frequently reported human cost to relocation in his study was the adjustment problems of teenagers. Raviv, Keinan, and Abazon (1990) observed another age variation in the experience of stress during relocation in a study in Israel, comparing 73 pre-adolescents (10-13 years of age) with 67 adolescents (15-18 years of age). Although they noted no significant differences between the two groups in terms of moving preparation (e.g., finding a new home), pre-adolescents reported significantly higher stress than adolescents in the social domain (e.g., moving to a new school, entering a new social circle) and relocation domain (e.g., leaving former neighbourhood, having a different room).

Felner, Primavera, and Cauce's (1981) investigation of the impact of school transitions on school adjustment (GPA and absences) suggested that transfers occurring between grade one and eight do not affect these measures. However, normative school transition (from elementary to middle or junior high, or from middle or junior high to high school) was associated with a decrease in GPA and an increase in absences, for both males and females (without control of ethnicity), and across mobility groups. On the other hand, a study of school transfer conducted by Ingersoll, Scamman, and Eckerling (1989) suggested that the negative impact of transfer is especially strong in earlier grades, and stronger on math scores compared to reading scores.

*Gender.* With regards to perceptions of relocation, Shaw (1979) observed that although boys and girls in military families saw moves as exciting, boys regarded moves as more important and easier than girls did. In their study in Israel, Raviv et al. (1990) stated that girls reported more stress than boys and they also felt more support than boys did.

DeWitt (1998) investigated the role of gender and mobility in the initial use of drugs and alcohol and the development of drug-related and alcohol problems among adolescents and young adults. Although mobile males compared to non-movers were more likely to initiate the use of illicit drugs at an early age, and more likely to hasten their time of alcohol and marijuana related problems, the reports provided by mobile girls were similar to those given by girls in the non-mobile group. Except for the early illicit use of prescribed drugs, which mobile girls tended to use sooner than the non-mobile group, no other significant differences occurred in reports of drug use. In addition, for girls, but not for boys, having moved twice appeared to serve a protective factor, by making mobile girls significantly less likely to hasten their time for first alcohol use compared to non-movers.

In the study by Brown and Orthner (1990), males were less affected by relocation than females, with mobile females reporting significantly lower levels of life satisfaction and higher levels of depression compared to girls who had not moved, and both groups of males scoring similarly in measures of self-esteem, alienation, depression, and life satisfaction. According to Pittman and Bowen (1994), boys in the Air Force, compared to girls, reported significantly higher levels of personal adjustment (e.g., absence of boredom, loneliness, and fear, and greater life satisfaction).

Felner et al. (1981), with respect to the impact of school transfers on school achievement and absences, observed that some effects were different for males than for females. When they grouped students according to gender and ethnic status, higher number of moves was associated with lower GPA only for black females, and higher number of moves was associated with more absences only for white females.

*Family factors.* Both Humke and Schaefer (1995) and Finkel (2001) included in their reviews, studies investigating family factors thought to mediate children's adaptation following



relocation. Pedersen and Sullivan (1963) observed that mothers of psychologically stable children scored significantly higher on the “Acceptance of Mobility” scale compared to mothers of emotionally unstable children. In addition, both mothers and fathers of the stable children scored significantly higher on the “Identification with the Military” scale compared with parents of the disturbed children. Stroh and Brett (1990b) observed an association between maternal adjustment (self-confidence and life satisfaction) and children’s adjustment and self-confidence, regardless of mobility. They also observed that father’s adjustment was beneficial to mobile children’s behavioural adjustment, independent of prior level of adjustment. Furthermore, children’s attitude towards moving and towards their new neighbourhood reflected their mother’s post-move adjustment, as measured three months after the move (Stroh & Brett, 1990a).

Children’s adjustment to relocation has been reported to be connected to various family factors as follows: family relationships are the most stabilizing factor for the mobile child (Stubblefield, 1955); children can be affected by a move to the extent that it upsets an already precarious family balance (Tooley, 1970; Switzer, Hirschberg, Myers, Gray, Evers, & Forman, 1961); parents’ negative reactions to a move affect children (Switzer et al., 1961); positive relationship with parents enhances a child’s ability to cope with a move and to make friends (Goldberg, 1980; Gordon & Gordon, 1958); and mobile children with behaviour problems had less involved parents, both in preparing a child for the move and in helping her or him make friends and getting involved in the community (Gabower, 1960).

Finkel’s (2001) study replicated these findings, indicating that children with a more positive mother-child relationship and less maternal depressive symptoms reported lower level of loneliness and social anxiety; self-esteem was positively correlated with family cohesiveness and better mother-child relationship; and externalizing and internalizing behaviour problems were

related to negative attitude toward the recent move, negative mother-child relationship, and more difficulties associated with the most recent move.

Further support for these findings was obtained in a study of adolescent adjustment following family relocation, indicating that quality of adolescent/parent relationship was identified as the factor making the largest unique contribution to adolescent personal adjustment (Pittman & Bowen, 1994). Tucker et al. (1998) examined the role of school mobility on the school lives (academic achievement and behavioural conduct) of nearly 4,500 students.

According to reports from parents, the authors observed that although mobility has no significant effect on the school lives of children who live with both biological parents, children living in alternative family structures experience adverse effects from any moves in their school lives.

*Ethnicity.* Kroger (1980b) observed in her pilot study that race was significantly related to rates of mobility, and she encouraged researchers to include this variable in studies of geographic relocation. Pittman and Bowen (1994) observed small but significant differences in military adolescent adjustment as a function of ethnic background, with Caucasians scoring higher in global, personal adjustment, compared with military adolescents of another racial and ethnic background.

As mentioned earlier under the discussion on gender, Felner, Primavera, and Cauce (1981) also found differences in correlations between GPA and school transfers as a function of ethnicity, with mobile Black and Hispanic students showing a more marked drop in performance following transfers compared with white students. In addition, as previously mentioned, Cornille et al. (1983) reported that, according to support providers responding to their survey, children from a different cultural background have a harder time adjusting to a new school compared with those more similar to the majority group.

### *The Process of Relocation and Related Theoretical Models*

How do children negotiate their way around the challenges inherent to their nomadic lifestyle? What resources do they draw on for coping? How does the preceding context of mobility influence the way children cope, and how does the child's family react to the child's coping style? Furthermore, what are the events associated with the nomadic lifestyle that the growing child sees as challenging or supportive?

The preceding review provided valuable information regarding the experiences and possible impact of mobility on the growing child. In this section, the process of relocation will be examined through the lenses of three different models available in the literature.

#### *Carlisle-Frank's Model*

Based conceptually on an integration of the literature from several disciplines, the multidimensional model of adaptation to relocation proposed by Carlisle-Frank (1992) incorporates three factors associated with adaptation to transition: personal, social, and environmental factors. This model is based on the assumptions that people have different reactions to relocation; multiple elements associated with the personal, social, and environmental factors interact in enhancing or hindering adaptation; and examination of these factors can help in identifying a personality profile for predicting who adapts readily and who is more sensitive to the effects of relocation.

Carlisle-Frank postulates that the following personal factors influence adaptation: personal control belief, hardiness, exploratory tendencies, self-concept, pre-relocation attachment, levels of preparedness, residential history, and contextual factors (i.e., choice about the move, congruence with relationships in various settings, etc.). Social factors influencing adaptation to relocation are number and types of social support systems available to the individual, level of preparedness for social-class mobility that might be related to the

geographical relocation, and an individual's social background and skills. Finally, the following elements were included in the environmental factors affecting the adaptation process: population density, access to facilities and services, economic climate, housing satisfaction, person-environment fit, place identity, and perceptions of the environmental setting (positive versus negative).

Adaptation to relocation is seen as a dynamic process that generates enduring changes in the overall life situation. It is defined as “an ongoing process of interaction between individuals and the systems of the family, work environment, social network, community, and the society” (p. 837).

#### *Chick and Meleis' Model*

As suggested by Puskar and Martself (1994), adolescent relocation can be examined as a life transition through the model proposed by Chick and Meleis. According to Chick and Meleis (1986), “transition, as passage from one life phase, condition, or status to another, is a multiple concept embracing the elements of process, time span, and perception. Process suggests phases and sequence; time span indicates an ongoing but bounded phenomenon; and perception has to do with the meaning of the transition to the person experiencing it” (p.239).

The process involves all events directly and indirectly associated with the disruption brought about by the transition, and the unfolding of events as the person responds to the disruption. The complete period of transition is thought to span from the time of acknowledgement that a new transition phase is about to begin to the time when new stability is reached. Perception is related to the experiences of the self (role ambiguity, and threat to self-concept) as the individual attempts to find a new level of stability.

Chick and Meleis (1986) suggested that transitions have five defining characteristics: process (ongoing, bounded phenomenon); disconnectedness (loss of familiarity with rules and

environment, separation from others and from means to satisfy needs); perception (individuals, communities, and societies will influence the meaning ascribed to transition, thus affecting responses to it and outcome); awareness (the experience of transition only begins with the awareness of the changes that are occurring); and patterns of response (observable and non-observable responses to the transition). Transition is seen as multidimensional, and its meaning for the individual can be explored by visiting these different dimensions: single versus multiple transition, clear versus ambiguous entry and exit, impeded versus unimpeded passage, minor versus major disruption, particular versus pervasive disruption, brief versus extended duration, temporary versus permanent, positive versus negative value, pleasant versus unpleasant, desired versus undesired, planned/predicted versus unplanned/unpredicted.

Therefore, well-being and adaptation to transition depend on the transition event, along with its several dimensions, its interaction with the environment, the responses of the individual, and the meaning obtained from the process.

#### *Stokols and Shumaker's Model*

Stokols and Shumaker (1982) described mobility as a dynamic process, which creates gradual but enduring changes in one's life. They stated that "the personal (and family) changes associated with moving are neither short-term nor confined to the residential domain but, rather, are enduring and affect virtually every facet of the individual's life situation" (p.153).

They suggested that the assumptions prevalent in the literature of mobility and health portray a very simplistic model, linking mobility to health via the mediating effects of predictability of the move and controllability of the environment. According to the contextual model proposed by Stokols and Shumaker, the effect of mobility on health is moderated by the degree of choice to relocate, the comparative assessment of person-environment fit, and the individual's tendency to explore new places.

They proposed that person-environment congruence be considered as a more important factor in moderating stress to relocation than the perceived controllability of the environment. According to Stokols and Shumaker, person-environment fit encompasses both *place specificity* (the extent to which one's preferred and customary activities are associated with the environment) and *place dependence* (the strength of one's subjective attachment to specific places). Particularly central to their discussion is the proposition that subjective perception of congruence involves the assessment and comparison of preceding, current, and forthcoming residential attachments and experiences. Thus, when one moves from a low level of person-environment fit to a high level of environmental congruence, the individual should experience positive outcomes from the relocation. Conversely, moving from high level of congruence to low level of congruence should be detrimental to one's health, with this impact diminishing with prospects of further relocation to higher levels of environmental congruence.

Congruence is measured not just in terms of the quality of one's job or one's home, but it is rather measured in terms of the extent to which the environment supports or hinders the achievement of one's various personal needs (e.g., having one's own bedroom, being able to play soccer, access to a library, being close to a church, enjoyment of current school). As they state, "the experiences associated with multiple life domains are interdependent, and ... people's reactions to relocation may be jointly influenced by the perceived congruence of both non-residential and residential settings" (p.160).

### *Concluding Remarks*

Despite the availability of theoretical models attempting to account for the processes involved in relocation, there remains a gap between these models and development of related research. As recognized in these models, relocation is a dynamic process, reaching many aspects of one's life experiences, and studies to date have been narrowly focused on pre-selected factors

thought to influence adaptation to relocation. Within psychology, studies of relocation have regarded mobility as the independent variable, and as for dependent variables, they have focused on psychosocial adjustment (emotional responses to mobility, social relationships, behavioural changes), family adjustment (attitude towards parents, parental responses to relocation), and adjustment to a new school environment (academic performance, adaptation needs). In an attempt to expand the body of knowledge, researchers have attempted to discern the mediating effects of certain variables in linking mobility to adjustment outcomes. Variables explored have been related to the move (e.g., frequency, distance, recency), to the individual (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, pre adjustment), and to the social context (e.g., family structure, social economic status), producing mixed findings.

This literature review illustrates how research on mobility has largely relied on the use of correlational studies. Although the majority of studies reviewed were presented under the heading “The Impact of Relocation”, it is imperative that causal links be interpreted with caution. The cautious reader must keep in mind the complexities of the process of relocation, as illustrated through the proposed models, and the multitude of pathways one can move from stability in one’s home to another phase of life in a new location. Whatever the condition may be after relocation, one must be reminded that relocation does not happen in a vacuum, and other processes happening in the individual’s life may be accounting for the observed changes.

The research currently available has focused widely on the negative consequences of mobility, with few propositions of beneficial effects, and there is a lack of studies investigating the meaning ascribed to relocation, and the long-term experiences of entering and exiting multiple communities, schools, and social groups. In addition, research to date has relied primarily in quantitative methods, often obtaining data about children’s adaptation from parents or teachers.

The present research is aimed at addressing many of the gaps in the literature, providing a more comprehensive examination of the experiences of growing up as a nomad, of the relationships between the several events taking place in the lives of the three women who contributed to this study, and an exploration of the meanings they derived from their lives as contemporary nomads. This study relied on qualitative methods of interviewing, and obtained first person accounts of the experiences of living with multiple relocations. As is described more fully in the following chapter, the stories shared by the three contemporary nomads in this study provide an emic perspective of the experience, impact, and meaning of this lifestyle, and highlight the important events surrounding adaptation to multiple geographic mobility that took place in the lives of the participants.



### Chapter Three: Methodology

I have often wondered what it is like for contemporary nomads to grow up moving from place to place. I wonder what main events associated with their lifestyle stand out for them and were these events challenging or supportive. I wonder about their own interpretation of causal links between events and outcomes and the meaning they continue to derive from their experiences. Looking back on their lives, do they identify the same kind of important elements which I found in recent literature about such experiences? How can parents, teachers, counsellors, employers, service providers, and communities support children of contemporary nomads? What have these nomads gained from their experiences? And most importantly, how can my research help inform the body of knowledge related to multiple relocations?

In this research I do not offer a list of events 'known' to cause a specific outcome. I do, however, offer more than a simple description of events surrounding multiple relocations. What I bring forth with this study is a new understanding and explanation of how events unfold in multiple relocations, based on subjectively experienced realities in the lives of contemporary nomads. Description, understanding, experiences, explanations, and meanings are the main issues addressed in this study. Description serves not as a model of what happens during multiple relocations, a model which may be superimposed on the lives of other nomads, but as possible choices for those entering a nomadic lifestyle. In this study, the events surrounding relocations are akin to the colours available to painters; the experiences and interpretations derived from the events akin to what painters choose to do with the colours in their palettes. The end products are the stories of contemporary nomads or, to follow the metaphor, the paintings of their lives. I do not offer explanations as laws or principles of causal links within the process of multiple relocations. Instead, I offer individual interpretations of connections and relationships between events and individual behaviour and experience.

### *Background Theory and Epistemological Issues*

Although I was trained in quantitative methods of research during my undergraduate program, I started this research with a keen interest in narrative studies. As I investigated the many pathways available to answer the above questions, I was particularly interested in how I could make use of life stories in my present research. Although intuitively using stories to understand the personal world of children living with repeated relocation seemed like an obvious choice, social science research needs to be supported by means other than intuition. Polkinghorne (1983) urged researchers to become methodologists instead of mere technicians, with ready-to-use methods for answering their research questions. In his words, “[researchers] need to concern themselves with the various approaches to the creation of knowledge and the ways in which these approaches use different logics to relate statements and meanings” (p.280). Crotty (1998) also offered a similar suggestion and I therefore embarked on a search for a methodology that contained a coherent set of methods and theoretical and epistemological assumptions.

As I departed from methods to epistemology and back again, my research questions were refined to reflect my identified epistemological assumptions and my theoretical preferences. At the end of this search, I chose to use a life-story interview approach to obtain first-person accounts of experiences relevant to answering the questions raised in this study, and these ‘first-person accounts’ or ‘stories’ were examined according to several principles of narrative analysis proposed in the literature. These methods fit with the phenomenological nature of the questions raised in this study, and are set against the backdrop of narrative theory and constructionist epistemology.

#### *Epistemological Assumptions*

In the early stages of my thinking about how to go about exploring the issues of experience, causality, and meaning, I found myself remembering my early experiences as a participant in several psychological studies. What stood out for me in these recollections, independent from the method of

inquiry used in the studies, was how I always left the research site thinking how incomplete my answers had been, or how difficult it had been for me to find *the answer* that could reflect my views in general. For me, the studies had failed to obtain my explanation for my answers. I was always left with the desire to sit with the researcher to explain why my answers took such a direction on that particular day, and how my answers could have been different the next day. I indeed believed that I was unable to formulate *the most truthful reply*, for I really felt a *true answer* was a momentary phenomenon susceptible to change at any time. Had I been truthful during the interviews? Yes, I had. Did I think the researchers understood my answers? Definitely not.

To make room for the participants in this study to fully explain their positions, and to clarify any uncertainties, face-to-face interview emerged as the most viable method of obtaining ‘true accounts’ of personal experience. As I continued to think about the answers I was to obtain during the interview, and the kind of knowledge claims I expected to make based on these answers, I found myself entering the epistemological stance called ‘social constructionism’. A social constructionist epistemology is grounded on the belief that human knowledge is created through interaction with the world (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985). The social world does not contain meaning that is waiting to be captured by the unbiased, objective observer, nor is it meaningless, waiting for the observer to cover it with meaning. Meaning is created through the interaction between the observer and the object. As Crotty (1998) professed, “because of the essential relationship that human experience bears to its object, no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object” (p.45).

Within the context of this study, therefore, it is assumed that the experiences and meanings contemporary nomads hold were created during their interaction with the family members, communities, cultural milieu, and personal friends with whom they interacted. Furthermore, as they relate these experiences to a researcher, further refinements and understandings of previous events are formulated

within the confines of the research endeavour. These new renderings of experience are co-constructed; they are created anew in the context of the relationship between the interviewer and the participant. The interview process, as Mishler (1986a) indicated, becomes a meaning making event where “the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent” (p.34). Therefore, in this study, original experiences can only be understood within the context of their creation between the individual and the event taking place, and the telling of these experiences can be understood only within the research context.

Gergen (1985, 1994) believed most social constructionist inquiry exhibits one or more of the following assumptions: a) people come to understand the world, to name it, categorize it, and to experience it, using preconceived ideas about it, and social constructionism takes a critical stance towards claims of objectivity in knowledge creation; b) people’s understanding of the world is dependent on the historical and cultural context in which interchanges among people take place; c) in social constructionism, ‘truth’ is subject to revision as social relationships unfold across time; and d) human action finds its roots in the meanings and knowledge people negotiate in social life. As such, my initial concern with causality shifted to an interest in the individual ‘interpretation of causality’, and my expectations for ‘true accounts’ of lived experience turned into hopes to obtain complete, well elaborated, richly described accounts of personal experience. When working from a social constructionist perspective, as Riessman (2002) argued, “verification of the ‘facts’ of lives is less salient than understanding the changing meanings of events for the individuals involved, and how these, in turn, are located in history and culture” (p.704-705). “The meanings of life events are not fixed or constant; rather, they evolve, influenced by subsequent life events” (705). Because this study is rooted on a social constructionist epistemology, it contains no claims of ‘true’ knowledge or ‘true’ interpretations; what it does offer is a momentary picture of the lives of three contemporary nomads.

## *Theoretical Underpinnings*

The questions I have raised in this study are of a phenomenological nature, seeking to capture the experiences and meanings of contemporary nomads as they negotiated their entries in several communities throughout their school years. Although at first it seemed that phenomenological perspectives were compatible with the goals I had set out for this study, it became clear that narrative theory was the more appropriate theoretical basis for guiding future methods for this research.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) placed phenomenology within the Weberian tradition of seeking understanding (*verstehen*) of phenomena, and stated that researchers in the phenomenological mode seek to understand the meanings people construct around events in their daily lives. As van Manen asserted (1997), “from a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p.5). In this sense, the questions in this study are suitable for the development of a phenomenological research method.

Phenomenology, as Crotty (1998) described it, started out as a critique of the limiting role of culture in mediating people’s experience of the world, and proposed that one could observe that objective world by bracketing the usual understandings he or she holds of things to see the ‘things themselves’. As it developed, phenomenology became the study of “people’s subjective and everyday experiences” (Crotty, p. 83). In a critique of the new form of phenomenology, Crotty stated:

What has emerged here under the rubric of ‘phenomenology’ is a quite single-minded effort to identify, understand, describe and maintain the subjective experiences of the respondents. It is self-professedly *subjectivist* in approach (in the sense of being in search of people’s subjective experience) and expressly *uncritical*... phenomenological research of this kind emerges as an exploration, via personal experiences, of prevailing cultural understandings. (p.83)

Whether a researcher seeks to provide a complete description of one’s subjective experience of his or her world, or to obtain a culture-free view of a particular phenomenon, phenomenological studies are based on the assumption that people’s experience of the world is mediated by their own unique perceptions of reality, which is subject to the lenses of the culture we live in. Phenomenology is

compatible with the assumptions of symbolic interactionism, which stems from the work of George Herbert Mead (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Crotty, 1998). According to one of Mead's students, Herbert Blumer, symbolic interactionism is based on three tenets:

“that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them’;  
‘that the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of the social interaction that one has with one’s fellow’;  
‘that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters’.” (cited in Crotty, 1998, p.72)

Phenomenology first appeared adequate as a framework to guide this study because of its focus on the study on human experience (Crotty, 1998). In addition, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) indicated that phenomenologists work under constructionist assumptions, asserting that there are multiple ways of interpreting experience and creating meaning through personal interactions with others. However, phenomenological studies take on an objectivist approach to research (Crotty, 1998), leading to identification of themes common to groups of people (Polkinghorne, 1989). Furthermore, this study is interested in more than just the experiences and meanings of multiple relocations. What this study needed was a framework that could allow me to reach the experiences and meanings in the lives of contemporary nomads, while providing a picture of the process of developing within the context of mobility. Although interest in the experience of mobility is vital to this study, so are the objects from which these experiences originate, such as new friendships, parental adaptation, school demands, and others.

It is with this focus on the individual context, personal experiences, and meanings that I arrived at narrative theory as an appropriate framework to fulfill the objectives of this study.

### *Experience and Narrative*

What narrative theory brings forth is the understanding of human experience as a narrative enterprise. It is compatible with constructionist and symbolic interactionist assumptions, and it adds a

narrative dimension to the process of experiencing the world and making meaning of those objects that our consciousness attends to. According to narrative theory, we interpret, make meaning, and experience the world through narratives (Bruner, 1986, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986).

According to the narratory principle proposed by Sarbin (1986), “human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (p.8). Dreams, fantasies, daydreams, rituals of daily life, pageantry of rites of passage, and rites of intensification, planning, remembering, loving, and hating, are all human activities guided by narratives (Sarbin, 1986). Polkinghorne (1988) stressed the role of the linguistic symbols we use in our interactions with the world, and argued that we construct meanings and come to understandings of the significance of our beings by means of narrative construction. As Bruner (1991) clearly stated, “we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on” (p.4). For Bruner (1990), psychologists need to concern themselves with what he calls “folk psychology” (p.35), which is a set of shared cultural meanings and symbolic systems used to interpret experience; narrative and narrative interpretation are the means by which researchers use folk psychology to explain human experience and action.

### *Narratives and Stories*

It is the unique way that narratives are constructed that meaning comes forward, and the literature on the role of narratives in mediating experience is replete with such structural accounts of narratives (e.g., Bruner, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2002; Sarbin, 1986). Narratives and stories have been repeatedly connected to each other, and both terms have been used in the literature to refer to first-person accounts of the development of an event, or the ‘how’s’ of an outcome. Narrative is defined in the online version of the Webster dictionary as, “that which is narrated; the recital of a story; the continuous account of the particulars of an event or transaction; a story” (<http://www.webster-dictionary.net/>). Story, in the same dictionary, is defined as, “the relation of an incident or minor event; a short narrative; a tale”,

among other meanings. In this study, I use the terms narrative and story interchangeably, and follow the currently accepted view of stories as the combination of successive incidents into a unified episode (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Riessman (2002) indicated that narratives are commonly characterized by investigators as speech sequences that contain plots, ordering and sequence of events, organizational structure (e.g., temporal, spatial, thematic, or episodic), and linguistic devices used by narrators to link parts into a whole and to communicate meaning. Sarbin (1986), for example, saw narrative as “a way of organizing episodes, actions, and accounts of actions; it is an achievement that brings together mundane facts and fantastic creations; time and place are incorporated. The narrative allows for the inclusion of actors’ reasons for their acts, as well as the causes of happening” (p.9). Polkinghorne (1995), similarly, defined narrative as a “type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes” (p.5). According to Polkinghorne (1988), narratives differ from chronicles in that the former includes the temporal dimension as observed by the continuity and development of events, as opposed to the latter, which simply place static events on a time line. For Polkinghorne (1995), the plot of the narrative gives significance and meaning to events by establishing relationships between them. In addition to giving meaning to events, plots also define the beginning and end of a story; they guide the narrator in the selection of events to be included in the story; and, they organize events in a temporal order leading up to a conclusion (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Drawing his views from literary theories, Bruner (1991) provided a comprehensive characterization of narratives. As Bruner described them, narratives are temporal in that they relate events occurring over time (*narrative diachronicity*); they are replete with details and particular events that both create and strengthen the overall flavour of the narrative (*particularity*); and, they provide “reasons” and “intentions”, not “causes” for actions (*intentional state entailment*). Narratives, according to Bruner, possess *hermeneutic compositibility*, making the creation and interpretation of parts and whole



inseparable. Narratives tell stories that represent a break from the expected and ordinary events of everyday life (*canonicity and breach*); their components “lose their status as singular and definite referring expressions” (p.13), as they refer to, and perhaps create, ‘verisimilar truths’ rather than real ‘truths’ (*referentiality*); and narratives contain *genericness*, taking the form of particular genres, or “conventionalized representations of human plight (the plot)” (p.14), and, as “a form of telling” (p.15), this genre guides the use of mind in interpreting the narrative in particular ways. Furthermore, Bruner identified that narratives reflect cultural norms (*normativeness*); they are subject to being interpreted on the basis of our beliefs about the teller’s intentions and knowledge, as well as on our own background knowledge (*context sensitivity and negotiability*); and, through time, narratives merge and become a culture (*narrative accrual*).

Kenneth and Mary Gergen (1986) identified two main characteristics of narratives:

“connectedness or coherence” (p.25), and a sense of “movement or direction through time” (p.25).

Narrative accounting includes a purpose, a goal, or a valued endpoint. Selected relevant events within the narrative are arranged in such a way that makes the achievement of the goal more likely. In addition to these two main elements, narratives are enhanced by their ability to show how one event follows from another, and by their ability to create feelings of drama and emotion (*dramatic engagement*) (K. Gergen & M. Gergen, 1986).

Narratives allow researchers to identify commonalities in people’s lives while keeping the uniqueness of each individual life in sight (Josselson, 1995). They permit researchers to view human agency and imagination as they are embedded in each individual context (Riessman, 1993), and they are suited for studies of personal experience and meaning (Riessman, 2002).

As these views of narratives indicate, the complexity of an individual’s life can be found in the stories each person tells about his or her world and his or her experience of it. Stories tell about the development of one’s world through time, indicating the relevant events connected to the formation of

this world as it is for the individual, pointing out explanations of causality, revealing purposes and goals of actions, as well as their resulting consequences. All of these elements can be identified in the stories each person tells of her or his own personal voyage in life, promoting a holistic understanding of each individual's life. It is with this understanding of stories that I propose to examine the lives of contemporary nomads. As many scholars have proposed before me, stories are the means by which one's experiences and meanings come forth, and therefore they are an ideal source of information for the completion of this study.

### *The Place of Truth in Socially Constructed Stories*

In using retrospective stories for exploring the experiences, meaning, and impact of mobility in the lives of contemporary nomads, one might raise the question of how true or how close to the reality they are. As stated earlier, this study is not seeking objectified truths but richly described narratives of personal experience. The view of narratives as social constructions entails that retrospective accounts of experience change with the passage of time, with one's growth, and with contextual changes. Therefore, the search for truth is incompatible with a social constructionist perspective.

Neisser (1994) argued that although some people, in some occasions, can have memories of things that never happened, not all memories are wrong. In fact, he suggested that memory is somewhat accurate in many situations but vulnerable to suggestion in others. He argued that distinctions exist between the event itself, the experience of the event, the remembering of it, and the version of the event created by the remembering act. What Winograd (1994) made of these discrepancies in retrospective accounts was that there were degrees of accuracy. "A memory that is inaccurate at a more detailed level of description", he stated, "may be accurate at a more general level of event description" (p.245). Both Winograd and Neisser agreed that although memory can be somewhat inaccurate, it must still be based on some real event that took place.

While Neisser (1994) focused on the role of memory in retrospective accounts, Riessman (1993) approached the subject from an interpretivist perspective. She argued that interpretation is present at several stages of representing experience in research, starting with the interpretation that takes place when the event occurs. Interpretation is again present during the retelling of the event in the research context, during the transcribing of the interview, during the analytic process, and then again when the report is read by a third person.

Similarly, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) believed that “stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these ‘remembered facts’” (p.9). Because living is a continuous process, and people’s lives do not stop so that they can make sense of them, events and experiences are continuously added to the process of meaning making, and therefore at no point can people have access to *the* life story. Furthermore, the life story told at any time is but a creation between the narrator and the listener, and the context in which the story is told (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

As I have already stated earlier, according to the social constructionist perspective, we make use of our shared cultural symbols to interpret experiences and to derive meaning from them; and it is through narrative, according to narrative theory, that people link events in a causal relationship. As part of an interpretive process, experience, meaning, and causality become subjectively experienced social constructions.

The constructionist view of the truthfulness of life stories is well illustrated by Atkinson (2002). He likened the life story created in an interview with a portrait painted from the side. He believed that although such a portrait differs from one painted from the front, they are still portraits of the same person, the difference being the perspective taken by the painter during the moment of creation. According to Atkinson (2002), “it is more important that a story be deemed ‘trustworthy’ than that it be

'true'. We are seeking the subjective reality, after all"(p.134). Like Atkinson, Riessman (1993) used the metaphor of the portrait, suggesting that "we cannot speak, finally and with ultimate authority, for others. Subjects 'do not hold still for their portraits'" (p.15).

In support of his social constructionist view of memory, Gergen (1994) reported observations from two studies. In one of them, adults conversed about their past experiences using each other to construct a mutually acceptable account of what happened. In the second study, parents helped children create memorial accounts of past events when looking at photographs, telling children even the emotional content of the family memory. "The past", Gergen (1994) stated, "is molded from conversations, and to 'remember oneself' cannot then be extricated from the agreements reached within relationships. To report on one's memories is not so much a matter of consulting mental images as it is engaging in a sanctioned form of telling" (p.90).

As Gubrium and Holstein (1995) so eloquently summarized the social constructionist perspective, "narratives are not simply more or less accurate reports of individual experience through time. Rather they are artfully and situationally constructed communications, offering a complex sense of biographical patterning" (p.47-48).

## *Methods*

### *Design*

The in-depth exploration of the experience and meaning of living with frequent relocation during school years was achieved through the collection of retrospective accounts of personal experience, using life story interviews.

### *Participants*

A convenience sample of four participants was initially selected to partake in this study. These participants were the first ones to express interest in partaking in this study who also met the following selection criteria: participants had no prior relationship with the researcher; they had experienced

multiple geographical relocations (a minimum of 4 moves) during childhood and adolescence; they were able to provide a rich account of their experiences; and, they were willing to provide in-depth information about the questions in this study.

All four participants were interviewed, but due to difficulties in meeting timelines of the study, one participant was eliminated prior to data analysis. As all participants were women, I will use feminine pronouns to refer to the participants for the remainder of this thesis.

### *Recruitment Procedures*

The first two participants to join the study were introduced to the research through colleagues of the researcher who knew of the selection criteria and knew the participants were qualified to participate. One of these participants was later eliminated from the study. The next two participants accepted in the study became aware of the research directly or indirectly through an advertisement (Appendix A) sent to members of a large recreational university group. All participants received a copy of the advertisement, which contained a brief summary of the study as well as contact information.

All participants contacted the researcher via electronic mail to demonstrate their interest in joining the study. After receiving more detailed information about the study (as outlined in Appendix B), including selection criteria and time commitment, all participants provided verbal consent.

### *Interviewing Literature, Life Story Interview, and Interviewing Skills*

Having identified stories as an integral part of this study, I now turn my attention to the methods used to obtain these stories. Although stories can be collected from journal entries, autobiographical accounts, or personal conversations during our daily lives, I have chosen to use face-to-face, in-depth interviews because of the possibilities they offer to explore meanings with the participants, to observe the context in which the stories are created, to enrich the meaning of the stories told with the behaviours accompanying them, and to empower the participant to have a more active role in this study.

Below you will find a series of suggestions on how to approach an interview with the intention of obtaining stories from the participants. Subsequent to that, you will become familiar with the interviewing choices followed in this study; choices that are compatible with the aforementioned epistemological and theoretical assumptions espoused in this research.

As Atkinson (2002) testified, “if we want to know the unique perspective of an individual, there is no better way to get this than in that person’s own voice” (p.124). Similarly, Lieblich et al. (1998) suggested that psychologists are able to explore and understand the inner world of their clients through the verbal accounts and stories these clients share about their lives and experiences. Face-to-face interviews “provide the richest data source for the human science researcher seeking to understand human structures of experience” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p.267) and they create opportunities to explore unclear or unexplored areas related to the purpose of the study (Ray, 1997).

The collection of life stories as a method of research is compatible with symbolic interactionism (Bennett & Detzner, 1997). As a form of reaching the symbolic in social life, and meaning in individual lives, the life story approach permits the researcher to access the actor’s perspective, the perspective of the individual narrating his or her own story (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984). Atkinson (2002) defined life story interview as “a qualitative research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person’s entire life” (p.123), with the intent of allowing the interviewee to look back in time and see his or her life as a whole. The researcher, according to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), attempts to “capture the salient experiences in a person’s life and that person’s definitions of those experiences” (p.78). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) used the term “life history” (p.56) interview to describe this method, indicating that within psychology this interview method is used to illuminate basic aspects of human behaviour or existing institutions as they appear throughout a person’s life.

The name ‘life history’ or ‘life story’ can be associated with interviews covering the entire life of a person, as in a biography, but it can also be used to focus on selected themes or periods of a person’s

life. As it pertains to this study, I used the life story interview to illuminate the experiences of multiple relocations during childhood and adolescence.

Because this study is based on a social constructionist epistemology, I use the term life story interview instead of life history interview to avoid any interpretations of the stories collected as final, definite, true accounts of the marks of history on one's life. Life stories in this study mean the stories told at one point in time in the context of the interviews conducted to highlight experiences of multiple relocations and, as such, they are susceptible to change.

As a form of interviewing, the life story approach is directed at creating the opportunity for the interviewee to tell his or her story as he or she chooses to tell it. According to Atkinson (2002), interviewee and interviewer become collaborators during the interview. The interviewee is the narrator of his or her own life, and the interviewer is the active listener and guide in the process, working together in the co-creation of a story that the narrator is pleased with.

Although stories have been reported to appear spontaneously during research interviews (Mishler, 1986b; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2002), Chase (1995) suggested a more direct approach. "If we take seriously the idea that people make sense of experience and communicate meaning through narration, *then in-depth interviews should become occasions in which we ask for life stories*. By life stories, I mean narratives about some life experience that is of deep and abiding interest to the interviewee" (p. 2).

In addition to starting with a good life-story question, at times Chase (1995) finds it necessary to encourage the interviewee to fill in what has been left out or to explore certain areas more fully. The interviewer, she stated, needs to use everyday language to formulate questions, to ask about experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The successful interviewer, she added, does not control the interview, but promotes a shift of the weight of responsibility to the interviewee. The goal is to develop a relationship with the participant in a way that he or she can embrace the responsibility for the meaning of their talk.

This shift of responsibility to the participant is achieved by requesting stories of “life experiences that the other seeks to make sense of and to communicate” (Chase, 1995, p.12). The role of the researcher, then, according to Chase (1995), is to articulate what, in the lives of the participants, is interesting in the first place.

Chase is not the only one to suggest means of encouraging the creation of stories in the context of interviews. In addition to using questions that open up topics for the participants to answer in the ways they find most meaningful, Mishler (1986a, 1986b) suggested that researchers must invite respondents to be collaborators in the study. In this manner, respondents are able to share control of the process. This sharing of control creates a place where interviewer and participants work together in trying to understand what the stories are about. Polkinghorne (1983) criticized interviews characterized by professional distance and lack of interest on the part of the interviewers. He stressed that researchers need to establish a relational context in which the participant feels free and encouraged to reveal his experiences as they appear to them.

The role of context in influencing the disclosure of personal experience is also of great importance in Riessman’s (1993) approach to narrative research. As she stated, “provided investigators can give up control over the research process and approach interviews as conversations, almost any question can generate a narrative” (Riessman, p.56). Riessman advocated less structure, making use of an interview guide containing five to seven broad questions about a topic, supplemented by probes to be used when respondents face difficulties in getting started or articulating their thoughts more fully.

Although Atkinson (2002) suggested more than 200 questions an interviewer can ask to obtain a life story, he asserted that the most essential element for a successful interview is flexibility. He suggests that interviewers use different questions in different contexts, including the use of meaning-related questions to elicit reflection on the part of the narrator. For him, theory may come into play as



researchers carry out the interview, but the process is highly subjective. In his words, “the life story interview can be approached scientifically, but it is best carried out as an art” (Atkinson, p.131).

In summary, the literature above suggests that the interviewer needs more than just a request for life stories. The interviewer, according to the above suggestions, is encouraged to ask questions about unexplored or underdeveloped parts of the story being told; to be flexible and to participate in the story telling with questions and responses that suit each individual situation; and, to reduce the relational distance between interviewer and interviewee to encourage self-disclosure. Thus, interviewers are encouraged to relinquish control of the interview process in favour of an egalitarian relationship, where both participants become collaborators in the creation of the story.

As presented by Bertaux and Kohli (1984), Shutze proposed a form of interviewing about life-world processes called the narrative interview. The narrative interview consists of two parts: (a) a period where the narrator/interviewee is free to tell his or her story uninterrupted by the interviewer, with the researcher intervening only briefly with small utterances when necessary to encourage further development in the story; and (b) a period used by the interviewer to raise questions about unexplored areas of interest to the study, or to encourage the narrator to elaborate more fully certain parts of the story told. Here again, as Bertaux and Kohli presented, Shutze proposed that interviewers should ask specifically for narratives or stories instead of arguments or reports. This method was intended to reduce an interviewer’s influence on the story created by the narrator in the first portion of the interview, with the intent of creating a story that reflects “the real sequence of events”. Although these intentions are incompatible with social constructionist beliefs, the two-interview format is useful in this study.

#### *Interview Choices and Data Gathering Procedures*

As stated earlier, answers to interview questions are always the product of the joint effort between interviewer and respondent, so I did not use the method with the illusion of obtaining a “true” account of personal experience. I did not wish to become the objective and distant researcher. My aim

was to interfere as little as possible not to avoid influencing the story, rather as a way to highlight my interest in the life story being told and, as suggested above, sharing the responsibility of the process with the interviewee.

During the first interview, I asked for stories and I encouraged the narrator to explore her own thoughts and arguments and to take her story to wherever endpoint appeared important. As suggested in the literature above, occasionally and when appropriate, I encouraged participants to clarify timelines as the story unfolded. When necessary, I used questions to encourage the exploration of meanings, feelings, and thoughts. In addition, I made use of summarization, paraphrasing, and encouragers as means of demonstrating my full involvement, interest, and understanding of the participant's experiences. These techniques were also used during the second interview, but questions during this second stage of the data gathering process were specifically created to address unexplored areas of interest to this study, and I assumed a more active role in determining the topics to be discussed.

From my personal experience in counselling settings, the role of establishing a trusting relationship in the interview context and flexibility on the part of the interviewer are paramount for fostering the production of rich accounts of personal experience. The meanings of interview questions are determined during the interview. What initially appears to be a good question that can elicit narratives, might be interpreted by the participant as a request for reports. The interviewer's innocent verbal or behavioural interferences might elicit long, richly described, narrative accounts of one's experience. This unpredictable character of interviews requires flexibility on the part of the researcher, an empathic stance toward the respondent during interview, and a partnership between researcher and participant in co-constructing the interview process.

In preparation for the life-story interviews, I brought not only a set of questions and probes to use during the interview (Appendix D), but I first and foremost brought myself into the process, so that participants could also feel free to be themselves. As a counselling student, I brought a commitment to

building a positive relationship, and an attitude of genuine interest in the lives of contemporary nomads to the interviews.

The data collection was comprised of two interviews with each participant. The interviews usually lasted more than the expected 120 minutes and the first interview tended to be the longer of the two. The first interview was open-ended, allowing participants to tell what they wished about their experiences. The second interview was a follow up to the first; I asked questions to fill gaps in the participants' stories and to focus on areas I felt needed more elaboration. Prior to the first interview, participants had the opportunity to read the guiding questions to prepare themselves for the narrative interview. Questions for the second interview were prepared separately for each participant depending on the content shared during the first interview. As these questions were derived from the stories told during the first interview, they were not shared with the participant prior to our second meeting.

After each interview, participants received a copy of their own interview transcript for revision of content and anonymity. The second interview was carried out only after the participant had completed this revision and only after I had the chance to examine the transcript once again to prepare pertinent questions for the following meeting. In one case, where the participant made significant changes to the transcript, part of the second interview was dedicated to a discussion of these changes. I sought better understanding between what I wanted to include in the transcripts as a researcher and future writer of the narratives, and the words and content the participants felt comfortable sharing with others.

During the analytical process, participants were available to answer any further questions that I felt necessary to include in their stories of growing up with frequent relocations. Due to geographical distance and time constraints, further questions and answers were exchanged via electronic mail because participants preferred this option to using the telephone. The use of electronic mail to obtain further information from two of the participants was deemed adequate as the participants did not report a

preference for another means of communication, nor did they report reluctance to provide personal information through electronic mail.

#### *Data Recording and Review of Interview Transcripts*

I chose not to take notes during the interviews, but I maintained a journal of general observations collected throughout the data gathering process. In addition, both interviews were video- and audio-recorded to allow for later revision of context, content, and subtle behavioural and emotional changes present during the interview. I personally transcribed each interview, including all questions, answers, pauses, notes on emotional tones (i.e., laughter, tears), and nonverbal behaviours accompanying speech (i.e., hand movements). During transcription, names and other possible identifying information were altered to maintain anonymity.

Each participant received a copy of her own interview transcript via electronic mail. Participants had the opportunity to change their pseudonyms, and they reviewed the transcript knowing they were allowed to modify, remove, or add any information they felt necessary to maintain their privacy or to better express the experiences they had shared during the interview. All participants chose to remove some of the many interjections present in the transcript (i.e., hmm, uh) and to correct grammatical errors, but only one participant made significant changes. These changes included wording choices and the removal of a large portion of disclosure that she felt was not necessary for the study. No wording changes affected the content of the narrative. After a discussion with the participant, it was decided that the large transcript portion that had been removed could only be included if a satisfactory summary was provided for her approval. A summary was satisfactorily created and wording changes that had affected the intensity of the emotional content were removed.

All interview materials were kept securely locked under the researcher's care until the end of the study.

## *Data Analysis*

I approached this study with the intention of obtaining a better understanding of the experience of growing up in the midst of multiple relocations, with an emphasis on the evolving and cumulative effect of these multiple transitions. I struggled with the issue of how to analyse the entire story, highlighting its particulars, and yet grasping the wholeness of the person in context. As a researcher immersed in the data, I had access to this entire perspective, but I found it imperative to find a reporting format that could retain the temporal character of human development. In keeping temporality as an integral need of the analytical and reporting processes, I chose to use the “narrative analysis” model proposed by Polkinghorne (1995), which results in biographical accounts of participants’ lives.

Based on the two modes of thought proposed by Bruner (1986), Polkinghorne (1995) made a distinction between ‘analysis of narratives’ and ‘narrative analysis’. Bruner (1986) argued that there are two modes of cognitive functioning used to organize experience and construct reality. The paradigmatic, or logico-scientific mode, organizes experience by categorization, either by placing information in already existing categories, or by creating categories inductively from the information being analyzed. The narrative mode privileges the uniqueness of each piece of information, and attends to the context in which the information stands, creating emplotted stories. According to Polkinghorne’s typology, ‘analysis of narrative’ uses paradigmatic mode of thought to interpret information, and ‘narrative analysis’ uses narrative reasoning.

The ‘narrative analysis’ proposed by Polkinghorne (1995) is a method of looking at the data with the goal of organizing all elements from the data into a coherent developmental account. As he concluded, “the result of narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about” (p. 16).

Polkinghorne (1995) suggested that narrative analysis be carried out by means of the seven criteria for judging a life history proposed by Dollard (1935), as summarized below:

1. The researcher must include descriptions of the cultural context in which the storied case study takes place.
2. The researcher needs to attend to the embodied nature of the protagonist, indicating how bodily dimensions and genetic-given propensities affect personal goals and produce life concerns.
3. The researcher needs to be aware of important others in the lives of the narrator, and how they relate to the actions and goals of the protagonist.
4. The researcher must attend to the inner struggles, emotional states, worldview, plans, purposes, motivations, interests, and belief system of the narrator, and describe the interaction between this particular protagonist and the setting.
5. The researcher needs to incorporate in the story the important social events affecting the narrator and those around him.
6. In developing a plot for the story, the researcher needs to identify the beginning of the story and the point of denouement, including enough detail to highlight the uniqueness of each character in a particular situation.
7. Finally, the researcher should make the final story appear plausible and understandable by creating a plot that connects the elements of the story into a meaningful explanation of the protagonist's responses and actions.

As a study rooted in social constructionist views of narratives, I also paid close attention to the process of co-creating the story, attending to my own reactions as a researcher, the reactions of the participants, and the relationships between myself and the participants. As Holstein and Gubrium (1997) stated, "the goal is to show how interview responses are produced in the interaction between interviewer and respondent, without losing sight of the meanings produced or the circumstances that condition the meaning-making process" (p. 127).

In transcribing and reading the transcripts, and reviewing them with the participants, I used two approaches to reading data. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) suggested that written texts be read several times, each time attending to one aspect of data: a) reading for the plot and for our responses to the narrative; b) reading for the voice of the 'I'; c) reading for relationships; and d) placing people within cultural contexts and social structures. Lieblich et al. (1998) suggested that narrative accounts can be read for content or form, and that researchers can use a holistic or categorical approach to interpreting data. In keeping with the narrative mode of thinking proposed by Bruner (1986), focusing on the process of experience, and reflecting the analytical process suggested by Polkinghorne (1995), the holistic-content, and holistic-form types of reading had applicability to this study. When using the holistic reading, one attends to the life story as a whole, "and sections of the text are interpreted in the context of other parts of the narrative" (p.12). The reading for content focuses not only on the explicit content - what is being told, the characters and events involved in the story, and so on - but also on the implicit content, such as the meanings and intentions of characters of the story. The reading for form is equivalent to reading for the plot and our responses, as proposed by Mathner and Doucet. It is directed at observing "the structure of the plot, the sequencing of events, its relation to the time axis, its complexity and coherence, the feelings evoked by the story, the style of the narrative, the choice of metaphors or words (passive versus active voices, for example) and so forth" (p. 13).

To completely immerse myself in the data shared by each of the participants, each story was developed separately from the next. I initiated the analytical process by reading the entire first interview for its plot, form, and my own personal responses to the narrative. As the second interview was not directed at creating stories, rather at filling in gaps in the story already told, this first type of reading proved to be fruitless for the second interview. Next, I read the interviews for their content, using coloured markers to highlight the following information: a) events; b) meanings and interpretations; c)

cultural contexts, social structures, and environment; d) the “I” of the participant and emotions; e) other characters in the story; and f) the relationships present in the life of the narrator.

Once the first two readings were completed and notes were made to aid the analytical process, I started developing an outline of how the participant’s story of frequent relocation should be formatted. This process was combined with a further reading, where I identified repetitive themes within the participant’s life story and selected pertinent quotes to be used in the development of the participant’s story. Further readings of the interviews and continuous readings of the life-story-in-progress were required during the writing process to ensure adequacy of quotes, inclusion of relevant details, coherence of the story, and quality as per the seven criteria stated above.

In this study, each of the developmental or biographical account was a product of the joint effort between each participant and myself. I, as the researcher, analysed the interview transcripts and created a narrative account from what the participant and I had uncovered during our hours together. I developed each of the stories following the above criteria and incorporated many of the participants’ own words. Although I wrote the narratives, the participants’ voices are immersed clearly in the biographies, making it transparent to the reader that authorship of the biographies does not rest in my hands alone, but within the work shared between each participant and myself throughout this study.

### *Ethical Considerations*

#### *Risks and Benefits*

Life-story interviews carve different roads depending on the stories participants tell. In some cases, memories are filled with notes of strength, resilience, family support, and personal growth; in other cases, participants disclose sensitive and distressing information pertaining to their past or present experiences. In this study, although all three participants disclosed sad and painful memories during the interviews, all of them were able to explore their emotions and switch topics when necessary. Although painful memories emerged, interviews were balanced with many notes of success and all three



participants enjoyed the experience of reading their own stories with their own words through someone else's voice.

### *Confidentiality and Informed Consent*

As with any study involving the disclosure of personal information, the issue of confidentiality was paramount in meeting ethical guidelines for research. Participants were informed verbally and in writing of their rights to confidentiality. They were given an information and consent form (Appendix C) that outlined details of the study, specifically stating that my supervisor would have access to the original data and stating their right to withdraw and to refuse to answer any questions. All participants understood their rights and signed the consent forms prior to the first interview. Consent was revisited once again prior to the second interview.

I personally transcribed each of the interviews using pseudonyms to ensure anonymity throughout the study, and upon its completion. In addition, participants had a chance to review and revise all transcripts as they saw fit to increase confidentiality and anonymity. Each participant was also asked to grant permission for my use of excerpts of verbatim material in the thesis. By signing a Transcript Release Form (Appendix F), participants acknowledged that the transcript was an accurate reflection of what was shared in the interviews. Participants had a final say in what was included in the final document. Sign-Off Release Forms (Appendix G) were signed once participants agreed with the accuracy of the final document.

Until the final draft was written, all videotapes, transcripts, rough drafts, notes, computer discs, and participants' names and contact information were kept securely locked under my care. Videotapes were destroyed at the end of the study, and all other materials were safely delivered to the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, where they will remain for five years, as per regulation of the University of Saskatchewan.

In addition to obtaining verbal consent prior to the first interview, I provided the participants with a second chance to evaluate willingness to embark in this study by again discussing with them all pertinent details of the study. Decision to partake in the study with full understanding of all that was entailed was ratified with signatures in two informed consent forms (Appendix C), one to be kept by the researcher, and another to be kept by the participant.

### *Judging Quality in Narrative Research*

In the following quote, Crotty (1998) stated what social constructionist researchers aim to achieve with their interpretive work: “Useful, liberating, fulfilling, rewarding interpretations, yes. ‘True’ or ‘valid’ interpretations, no” (p.48). Although this goal may contrast with positivist notions of what constitutes quality in research, Riessman (1993) had the following to say regarding assessment of quality of interpretive research: “There is no canonical approach in interpretive work, no recipes and formulas, and different validation procedures may be better suited to some research problems than to others” (p. 69).

I have used several different suggestions from the literature to ensure the quality of this study. In addition to using Polkinghorne’s (1995) suggestion to use Dollard’s criteria in creating a biography of each participant, I have also used the criteria below to ensure quality throughout the research process.

### *Coherence*

As a measure of internal validity, Atkinson (2002) suggested that parts of the story told should not contradict others. Atkinson qualified his statement by acknowledging that life is punctuated with contradictions. As events and people change, so do our experiences, perceptions, and reactions to our surroundings. However, our stories of what happened should be consistent. This is a valid point both with respect to the interview data, the generated biographies, and the interpretations derived from the study. This was achieved by listening for and addressing contradictions during the interviews and revision of transcripts and biographies.

### *Corroboration*

Also called member-check, the corroboration criteria urges researchers to bring transcripts and the generated biographies back to the participants to ensure that the texts reflect their views (Atkinson, 2002). According to Riessman (1993), another level of correspondence that must be addressed during research is that between the researcher's and the participants' interpretations. It is difficult to establish the second type of correspondence, and therefore the participants' interpretations are included in their own stories, while the researcher's interpretations are exposed in a separate chapter. As already stated, the participants in this study had a final say in their preferred story, and they had various opportunities to add, delete, or change any information given during the initial interview. As Bertaux and Kohli (1984) suggested, further corroboration may come from the scientific community. During this study, I was under the supervision of three faculty members and an external examiner. The main point, according to Atkinson (2002) is: "The standard being put forth here is that the life storyteller has the final say in telling the story, even after it has been transcribed, because he or she is the one telling the story in the first place and is the one to determine how it all fits together, what sense it makes, and whether or not it is a valid story" (p.135).

### *Persuasiveness*

Both Riessman (1993) and Gergen (1985) believed that the acceptability of stories depends, at least in part, on the impact they have on those reading them. If others find them convincing, if they resonate with their personal experiences or with the experiences of others they know, or if they touch them in an emotional way, compelling, stimulating, delighting, or inviting them in any way, then the research has been persuasive. Although this is a continuing process, all those involved in the completion of this thesis were asked to judge the persuasiveness of the study. Ultimately, persuasiveness lies in the opinion of others regarding the study. Following Riessman's advice (1993), I sought persuasiveness by

supporting theoretical claims with evidence from informants' accounts, and by exploring alternative interpretations of the data.

### *Quality of Craftsmanship*

In addition to the criteria described above, I used some of the criteria proposed by Kvale (1995). I agree with Kvale when he proposed that quality is ensured not at the end of the study, but throughout the stages of knowledge production. Although Kvale proposed several stages in which craftsmanship is required, some have more applicability to this study than others. As the analytical stage is emphasized with the criteria described above, I wish to focus now on the stages preceding analysis. I hope that this study will be judged on the basis of two major phases of knowledge production, its methodological conceptualization and the interview process. To allow others to evaluate the quality of these stages, I deconstructed the methodology used in this thesis. I created a map of my thinking processes as I made choices on how to answer the questions raised in this study. I also wrote extensively on the process of interviewing and the choices made during this study. As suggested by Riessman (1993), I have made the interview process visible by describing it prior to the presentation of each of the biographies, so as to allow others to establish their own conclusions of the quality of craftsmanship.

### *Pragmatic Validity*

As Kvale (1995) suggested, there are two types of pragmatic validation that go beyond the reading of the study: "whether a knowledge statement is accompanied by action, or whether it instigates changes of action" (p.34). For Riessman (1993), pragmatic validity is based on how the story becomes the basis for another's work. I see this quality criteria as an extension of persuasiveness, with the latter being the strike of the ball, and the former being its continued movement through the field. It is impossible to foresee the multitude of ways we can touch other's lives with one action or statement. In this study, I disclosed the various forms that contemporary nomads' stories impacted my thinking and theorizing about being human, about human development, and about the many other ways their stories

come to change my professional and personal life. I have asked reflective questions to the counselling community, parents, and educators with the intent of enticing pragmatic validity. At the end, if the strike of the ball can promote slight changes in others on the field, a new picture of the game can emerge, and I will have succeeded with my endeavour.

## Chapter Four: And Then, Another Move: Three Narratives of Growing Up With Frequent Relocations

### *Introduction*

How many of us can look back in our childhood and adolescent years and associate most memories to one place we call home? How many of our current neighbours can remember our first bike ride, our graduation day, or how tall we were getting with each passing year? How many teachers, schools, and friends from our early school years are still around us today?

As I listened to the life stories of the three women who volunteered to share their experiences with all of us, I was reminded of the unfolding of my own life story and of the common threads and unique patterns we created along the way, of the similarities and the many differences among our stories. I grew up living in one single neighbourhood, sharing the streets with the same neighbours. Despite having moved homes twice during my educational years, I continued to attend the same schools as the other children in the area. The stories you are about to read are of a different kind. The three stories that comprise this chapter were all immersed within the backdrop of multiple farewells and multiple new beginnings. There were always new homes, new schools, and new surroundings.

The names and geographical locations used in the stories below were all changed to protect the anonymity of the participants, but the details of each story are all drawn directly from the interviews conducted in the context of this study. As an academic product, let's not forget that these stories first and foremost are a reflection of what these three women shared of their experiences with multiple relocations, and that despite the fact that I am the narrator of these stories, their voices also speak to us.

In this chapter you will find the stories of three women - Claudia, Danielle, and Leona – and their experiences growing up with multiple geographical relocations. All italicized texts

within the stories are direct quotes from the interviews. These quotes are the words chosen by these women to describe their experiences, to explain their lives, to express their emotions, and to create their meanings during the hours we spent together recollecting their memories of growing up with frequent geographical relocations. Description, understanding, experiences, explanations, and meanings, these are the main issues addressed in this study, and these are contained in the stories below.

As a result of my personal preference, I opted not to follow APA guidelines for these stories, because I felt they constricted my writing style. I have written the three stories in much the same way I would have shared them with someone in person. As you read many of the quotes in the stories, you will encounter ellipsis which symbolize a pause in the participants' telling of their story, sometimes representing a step in pulling thoughts together, and at other times representing an unfinished, faltered, or fragmented sentence. Ellipsis points within parentheses, on the other hand, indicate that a portion of the quote has been omitted. These omissions occurred when more than one thought was discussed at the same time, and including all thoughts in the quote would have made it confusing for the reader. Other omissions were only a matter of reducing the length of the quotation. In a few instances, some quotes included words or expressions that required further explanations, and therefore I have included short explanatory notes within brackets to facilitate understanding. With these notes in mind, accept and embrace the stories that were so graciously shared with us.

### *Claudia's Story*

What a great childhood Claudia had! Living in the beautiful and friendly province of Nova Scotia, on the eastern coast of Canada, Claudia was able to enjoy many adventures outdoors. She relishes in the memory of the many friends and relatives she encountered along the way, as she moved through four different cities and several homes and schools during the four years she lived there.

Claudia's story, though, starts in southern Alberta, where she was born in 1985. For the first three years of her life, she lived with her mother in a small community near Lethbridge, where she remembers going to daycare while her mother went to College. Then, the two of them, mother and daughter, moved to Red Deer, where Claudia humorously remembers getting bitten by one of the many kids she remembers playing with at day care. One of Claudia's most vivid memories from those earlier years is her mother's wedding on the West coast when she was four years old.

For the first four years of her life, it was only Claudia and her young mother living together. Claudia had no father or grandparents in her life at that time, and although her uncle lived in the same province, her mother was not on speaking terms with him at that time, so that meant the two of them had no relatives around. Her only other relative, her aunt, lived in Nova Scotia, a place she remembers visiting and enjoying sometime in her early childhood. Things changed for Claudia with her mother's wedding. While still living in Red Deer, Claudia, the vivacious, tomboyish, outgoing four-year old girl, once the only daughter and significant other in her mother's life, was to all at once gain a new father and a new set of grandparents. Changes continued as the family grew rapidly after the wedding, with her baby sister Katie arriving in the same year, and her brother Arthur arriving about a year and a half later.



*My mom getting married and having two kids right away, that was a lot to deal with too. 'Cause, I mean, it was just me and my mom for four years. So I wasn't used to having people around the house, and ... just having a father around even, was new for me.*

Although there were many changes for her to deal with, Claudia admitted she was “very, very excited” to have a little sister. It was fun for Claudia to have a baby around the house, and she enjoyed playing with Katie. She welcomed both Katie and Arthur home and only felt jealous when her own friends from school would give the babies more attention than they gave to her.

Claudia remained in Red Deer for another three years until her mother's divorce. Although she always made friends very easily, for some reason she never did get along well with her stepfather during the time he stayed with the family. “*He must have been a nice guy*”, she commented. Although she was only about seven years old, Claudia had started to notice that Sam did not look after her and her two siblings as a parent should, doing things such as leaving them for too long under the hot sun, or putting her baby brother in hot water when he was only two.

*I don't think he was really ready to be a parent. He was an only child all his life and it just didn't click that he had to take care of something now. (...) The two of us never got along, though. I don't know why.*

Claudia at that time was already feeling responsible for the well-being of her young siblings and especially that of her mother, a weight she still carries on her shoulders.

*I don't like seeing them hurt by other people and stuff like that. It's hard...to just watch that. I know I have to let them learn on their own, my sister and brother, but it's hard to see my mom go through that stuff. I have to help her. It's hard because I don't want to overstep my boundaries as a daughter, but I'm just too protective of her.*

After her parent's separation, came the first big move that Claudia remembers. Nova Scotia. Claudia was seven years old, and at the end of grade one. She was disappointed to be leaving her friends, her home, and school, the things she was comfortable with, but moving to Nova Scotia, to be with her aunt, to a place she remembered liking so much, was truly exciting. The train trip getting there was a memorable event, as was their arrival in Nova Scotia, with the

sounds of crickets warming their summer evening as her aunt picked them up from the station. It had been a very long trip, especially with two babies, but Claudia had wasted no time, and had enjoyed every second of her first train ride, moving between cars, playing chess, and making friends.

Claudia was to remain in contact with her stepfather for several years after their separation, as in order to meet the obligations of visiting rights, the three siblings travelled across Canada every summer to Red Deer to see Sam and his parents. Claudia's feelings toward her stepfather didn't change, and these visits were very stressful for her in many ways.

*I've never really liked him [Sam]. I hated going down there. I loved going to see my grandfather, but when he died that's when I stopped wanting to go see them.*

*He wasn't my favourite person...at all. And I still, at that point, didn't think he took care of my sister and brother enough.*

*I didn't really want to go, and I was nervous and stuff like that. I thought I'd have to take care of my sister and brother, so that was kind of stressing me out, just ... the responsibility.*

So, although Claudia disliked the disruption of the comfort of living in Red Deer and she missed her grandfather, who passed away a few years later, her separation from her stepfather or grandmother was not difficult to accept. Even today, she feels no special attachment to them.

*I really miss my papa. I don't miss my stepfather and I really should go and see my grandmother there, but I haven't. She wasn't the nicest lady. She doesn't even let us call her grandma.*

Despite the several moves and demands fallen upon Claudia's shoulders during the years she lived in Nova Scotia, Claudia narrated a story of a child full of adventures. Her stories almost sounded like those of the characters created by Mark Twain living on the banks of the Mississippi River; not in terms of the events that took place in her life, but in terms of the vivid imagination and delight in being a child in full contact with her surroundings. She recalled rolling in the mud with friends, filling up buckets with ants, having water fights in the house, sitting on the porch

outside her second floor bedroom window, playing in the snow, playing with discarded business papers stacked near her house, running by the ocean, sliding down into a deep ditch by means of a rope attached to the side, climbing up trees in what sounded like a little kid's paradise. As she herself pointed out, *"I wasn't indoors much when I lived in Nova Scotia at all, 'cause I always lived in the country for the most part"*.

Upon the family's arrival in Nova Scotia, they lived at first at Claudia's aunt's house in the small lake community of Lilly Lake. Within the same year they moved three more times. First, they moved in with her aunt's friend within the same lake community; next, they moved to the nearby town of Lower Sackville; and then a third move back again to Lilly Lake. One year, one province, one family. Two cities, three moves, four homes.

Living in her aunt's very large house, across from Lilly Lake, where it seemed it was always misty and foggy, Claudia remembers staying awake many nights in her cold room afraid of the shadows and the implications of living in a genuinely haunted house in the countryside. She cannot recall how long she stayed at her aunt's, nor does she remember how long they stayed at their next home, at her aunt's friend's house, prior to moving to Lower Sackville. She does remember, though, being the first one in her family to meet Greg at this friend's house. Little did she know that Greg would soon become part of her family, her future step father. Claudia's mother and Greg met each other not long after, and the two of them initiated what would become a very long relationship.

When Claudia, her mother, and her siblings moved to their third home in Nova Scotia, in the town of Lower Sackville, when it was a much smaller city than it is today, Greg moved in with them. There, Claudia spent many hours playing with her friends who lived in the same apartment building, and she warmly remembers her family's consternation at having to cut off the top of a Christmas tree so it would fit in their small living room.

Not much longer after their move to Lower Sackville, the family, along with Greg, moved back to Lilly Lake. Claudia, at eight years of age, was living once again in her aunt's haunted house, because it was available to them at that time. These three last moves must have occurred shortly after each other, because Claudia remembers being able to complete grade two at the school near Lilly Lake. She has no recollection of going to school in Lower Sackville or when she was living in Lilly Lake for the first time with her aunt or with her aunt's friend. This time, though, it was different. Claudia stayed long enough in this community to complete her school year, and she was now living with Greg, her new stepfather. This was to be the beginning of a very supportive relationship for Claudia, as she later recalled, "*My dad and I are very close. I was a big daddy's girl, for sure. We did a lot of stuff together*". He would later introduce her to the love of music, and they were to enjoy playing and going to concerts together.

Claudia enjoyed her father's companionship and playfulness at home. She remembers having a huge bedroom, where she neatly organized all her precious Barbies in a special area of her room, something she did after each and every move. Claudia now laughs at the terrifying moments she endured when her father held the basement door shut leaving Claudia by herself at the top step of her haunted basement. She remembers how furious she became one time when she came home from school to find all her Barbies spread all over her bedroom floor, because her sister had been playing with them. But, she also remembers loving the snow and winter in Nova Scotia, the time Greg had to build a passageway in the banks of snow from their front door to their garage, the snowmen she built with her siblings, and her adventures outdoors living in the country.

Thinking back on those days, Claudia reflects on the reasons why they ended up leaving Lilly Lake after she completed grade two, when she was just over eight years old. Perhaps her mother longed to have a place of her own rather than borrowing her sister's house, or perhaps her

mother needed to be closer to where she could work, because they only had Greg's vehicle and living in the country meant that everything was far away. The fact that her aunt was about to get married and needing some of her possessions back might have added to the impetus to leave Lilly Lake and move to Wolfville, which was a much bigger town compared to the countryside. This would be her fifth home in Nova Scotia, and her seventh home in eight years.

Although the first big move to Nova Scotia was an exciting change for Claudia, she disliked the constant moves, both for the physical demands that packing required and the other disruptions it caused. *"It kind of just got hard to deal with and kind of disappointing to have to pack everything up, move again, start over again ..."*. It was hard to make friends and then have to leave them behind, and Claudia remembers complaining about other losses as well.

*Oh, but I just made new friends, I just started a new school, I just got used to the way this teacher teaches..., I got used to being in this area, I don't know the area again...*

Despite the feelings surrounding the constant moves, moving during the years she lived in Nova Scotia, as she put it, *"wasn't so much of a big deal ... because I was young and it wasn't at the forefront of my head"*. She was able to just pack up, bring all the things she had been accumulating over the years, set up a new home and a new bedroom somewhere else, and get ready to have fun at the new place. What was to become clear to Claudia later in life was that the things she kept in her own private bedroom as she reorganized it neatly and in the exact same way after each move, and the constant company of her family were the stabilizing factors in her life amidst the constant changes.

*Those were the only two things that were ever really constant. My family was always there, and everything in my room always had a place. It was definitely something that was the most constant thing.*

Since her arrival in Nova Scotia, Claudia had felt very well received by everyone, as she commented, *"Most Nova Scotian people are really nice. They're really friendly and they take you*

*under their wing and they're pretty cool. I really liked them. The atmosphere is very relaxed".*

However, as nice as people were and as outgoing and friendly as Claudia was, relationships outside of the family circle were not enduring, not the ones from Alberta, and not the ones in the new province up until that point. She did not keep in touch with her friends from grade one, and the distance between her several homes in Nova Scotia made it difficult for her to keep in contact with friends from Lower Sackville or Lilly Lake. She never really enjoyed talking on the phone, so phone calls were sparse, and in those days she could not use electronic mail to communicate with her friends, both because of the technology available at that time, and the fact that her family did not own a computer.

*I didn't really keep in touch with my friends in Alberta. And I didn't have many friends in Nova Scotia, because we didn't stay in one place long. Not any I saw a lot of anyway. It was always a big deal when I got to go see any of my friends.*

*It was kind of like, you'd try to stay in touch for a couple of months after you moved, but there was just so much in between you that it was hard. It was hard to, you know, go see them. And also our lives were so different because we were going to a different school. When you're in elementary school there's not much more to talk about than what you're doing in school. So we had nothing in common anymore.*

After just one year in Nova Scotia, Claudia was enthusiastic about her new house in Wolfville, which was located right across from a convenience store. She remembers loving her bedroom with its huge window and a window box, and the servant staircase located right next to it. This old house had two staircases, and it allowed for great times chasing her father and siblings up and down these stairs. In addition to Greg's presence in the family, Claudia's memories from this stage of her life revolved around other members of the extended family, including her aunt with her son Alex, and her aunt's new husband with his nephews and nieces. During the year they spent in Wolfville, Claudia also remembers that her cousin Alex started spending a lot of time at her house, because he did not get along very well with his new stepfather.

Claudia quickly embraced the new members of her extended family, especially Sophie, her aunt's new niece. Sophie was a few years older than Claudia but the two of them played together often. This friendship was of special significance to Claudia at that time, not only in terms of the intrinsic value of having a friend to play with, but also in terms of seeing Sophie as the figure of an older sister. She saw in this newfound cousin a friend and protector, somebody who could look after her and take care of her.

*It was kind of like I was her little sister and she was just taking care of me kind of thing, so it was nice. It was nice to have a friend like that.*

*And, it was just nice that ... like, she was part of my family too. That's another thing. We didn't see a lot of my family when I lived in Alberta... We didn't have a lot of family, so I guess it was nice that I saw Sophie and she was gonna be part of my family and stuff like that, she was gonna be my cousin, and ... She was really nice.*

At eight years old, Claudia had to take care of herself and her siblings while her mother was at work. Her siblings played together a lot, so she was able to do her own thing while keeping her eyes on them, intervening from time to time to protect Arthur when Katie tried to blame him for things he had not done. As Claudia felt responsible for the well-being of her mother and of her siblings, having her cousins Alex and Sophie around was a welcomed, despite short, change in her life, because she could experience the relief of not having to care for others, and could instead put herself under the care of these older cousins, who she considered like older siblings.

Claudia's family stayed in their first home in Wolfville only until they discovered they were sharing it with a mouse. At that point, her mother made the decision to move. This time they moved to an apartment where Claudia and her sister had to share a room. She remembers having fun at that apartment, even though she still clearly remembers her younger brother staying awake in the night in his bedroom trying to send a ghost away. As Claudia pointed out, ghost

stories are common across Nova Scotia. Her biggest memory, though, was her brother being potty trained at that time.

Although Claudia's story of moving around retained its joyful spin, those were hard times for her. She could feel her mother's tension and stress at home, as her mother coped with divorce issues and visitation rights, and with the trying task of potty training a young child. Things became even more stressful upon their return from their summer visit to Alberta, when Claudia's mom started suspecting that Katie, and possibly Claudia as well, might have been molested during their visit to Red Deer. Claudia, who remembers feeling very uncomfortable having to discuss sexuality with her mother, disconfirmed the suspicion. Today Claudia realizes how difficult those days must have been for her mother, to have to spend summer away from her kids, especially with them being so young, and to have to worry about losing custody of Katie and Arthur.

*I could feel the tension. I could feel the frustration. I could feel it more than I could understand it. So I knew it was there. I knew what was going on. I just didn't understand why it was happening kind of thing.*

*I can't remember if my mom explained this to me or if I kind of explained it to myself, but it wasn't my problem, and that's what I had to get through to myself, is that it really wasn't something that I really needed to deal with.*

Although Claudia and her mother have always been very close, with her mother sharing many aspects of her life with Claudia, she is able to recognize how protective of her siblings her mother has always been. During their stay in Wolfville, Claudia was not only coping with a lot more responsibility at home, but also with her mother's stress and unavailability. Because her siblings received most of her mother's attention, Claudia started feeling that she was "*playing a little bit less of a role*" and she felt really left out, sad, and upset. She recalls with enthusiasm the day she finally had her mother's attention, when they spent time together playing in the snow.



*There was a lot of snow in our backyard. We had so much fun. It was one of the best snow days I've ever had, 'cause I got to play with my mom and it was pretty cool. It was just me and my mom again.*

The family didn't stay in Wolfville long enough for Claudia to finish grade three, but she did have a chance to make a couple of friends and to celebrate her ninth birthday in that apartment. Claudia had to finish her school year in a new location, where her dad's mother lived. And so the five of them packed up their things and left for Minasville, along with Claudia's new cat, who was to remain with the family throughout their further moves in Alberta.

Minasville. This is where Claudia finally had a chance to attend school for two consecutive years, because they stayed in this oceanside town until the end of grade five, after Claudia turned eleven. Claudia absolutely loved their new acreage and all that the landscape around it offered her. Even her bedroom was special, in that it had a porch roof outside her window where she could sit. She found it amazing to live within walking distance of the ocean, and she would go to the beach often for family gatherings when her aunt's family came to visit, or for birthday celebrations, or just to be by the water. Even in the Fall, when she was older, she would bike there and just sit and spend time by the water, and visit her special little corner she had discovered. The acreage offered more than just an enormous house; it also offered many trees, a huge ditch with a stream of water, and even a decrepit pig pen. As "a bit of a tomboy", Claudia relied on her imagination for entertainment; her new home was a world of joy for her. Claudia could only hope that they would stay in that place for a long time.

It was with great excitement that Claudia joined her new school towards the end of grade three. In the following two years, until the end of grade five, Claudia accumulated many memories with the friends she developed in school. Teachers and schoolmates were all very nice to her, and she made friends right away. Because Claudia's school was very small, she stayed with the same class year after year, which allowed her to get to know and be friends with

everybody in her class. “It was really nice that I made friends no problems, and I kept friends really well”, she commented. With all the friends she made in her new school and with all the attention she received from them, feeling left out at home was no longer an issue for Claudia.

*It wasn't as hard for me because I had friends by that time. I had friends that were more than just casual acquaintances. We'd have sleepovers, and they'd call me, and we'd have fun at school, and stuff like that. So I had more stuff to do that was outside of the house...I had my own thing to do. I didn't just have my mom, my sister and brother anymore. I think that made a big difference.*

Claudia recalls the Halloween and birthday parties she had at her house, the sleepovers in her friend's trailer, and the time she and one of her friends found themselves covered by June bugs in the middle of the night as they slept outdoors. It was in this context that Claudia carried on her life in Minasville, with her memories mostly centred on her new friends. Family life was highlighted only by the occasional problems occurring between Claudia and her sister, and by her memory of the time their Christmas tree was so big that they only had enough decorations to cover one portion of it.

One of the challenges for Claudia, though, was to take the school bus along with her sister every morning. Claudia never knew exactly when the bus would come by, and that was her only chance of getting to school. As she considered herself “kind of a nerd” because she liked school so much, there was always a fear that she would have to stay home if she missed the bus.

*I've always really liked school. I liked being at school. That's where all my friends were. That's where I got to see them all the time. Because I couldn't see them when I was at home because it was so far away, right? So yeah, it was very frustrating for me when I would miss that bus.*

Claudia remembers the bus rides and almost hitting the roof every time they would go down this one particular hill. She remembers the time when an older girl started bullying her on the bus, until Claudia ended up in the principal's office for having talked back to this girl to defend herself. In spite of this, and in spite of her growing problems with her sister, who insisted

on being just like her and who would from time to time irritate Claudia by getting into her bedroom and taking her personal belongings, those were good years. Claudia thought her teachers were great, and she remembers getting her first medal in a speech contest.

Two months before the end of grade five Claudia found out she was to move back to Alberta at the end of the school year. As it turned out, that was the longest time Claudia ever had between finding out about a move and the move itself. This allowed her enough time with her friends to talk about their future separation and to celebrate their time together prior to her departure.

*I don't remember if my mom sat us down or not, she might have thought we were too young to even care about it. So, I don't know. But I remember having big discussions with my friends, like, "Oh my God. I'm moving away. I'm gonna miss you guys so much". I remember that. Yeah, they had big discussions like, "Oh, Claudia is going away. Let's do special things for her". I was like, "yeah, this is so great".*

Claudia felt supported by her parents in all her plans to do as much as possible with her friends before she left. Claudia and her friends were able to enjoy each other's company as much as possible until the end of that school year, when during a fieldtrip away from Minasville the entire classroom surprised Claudia with a t-shirt with everybody's signatures on it, including the teacher's. In Claudia's own words, *"It was one of the best times I've ever had with my friends"*. Those friends were to, once again, contact Claudia the following year by sending her a card with everyone's signatures on it. Those were very special gifts for Claudia, because she felt so special and so important to them, even a year after her departure. She still keeps the card and the t-shirt as memories from those great years. As Claudia indicated, *"I think that was one of the best classes I've ever been in. It was great. It was nice to have all those friends"*.

The move back to Alberta was to be the last one between cities, but Claudia's family was to continue moving homes frequently while in Edmonton, and Claudia was to change schools two more times, once at the end of elementary school, and once more at the end of junior high. While

her story about growing up in Nova Scotia was replete with fun and excitement, somewhat of an adventure, her story back in Alberta was more like a drama, because she was to face and survive many challenges. Contrasting her past with her present, Claudia realises that now she is finally at a point in life where she is no longer feeling a heavy weight on her shoulders and she is finally able to enjoy some stability and hope for the future.

The move to Alberta came at a time when many people from the Atlantic Provinces were moving to Alberta in search of better jobs. Thinking back about those days, Claudia believes her parents were in the same position. By that time, Greg was already considered a father to Claudia, and her siblings were still young and needing her assistance as an older sister. They moved during the summer and were able to spend some time with her father's relatives in a small northern Alberta town. Her mother could hardly wait to move to a bigger city, but Claudia, who was eleven years old, enjoyed the company of the new relatives she met. She fondly remembers her new uncle, who enjoyed dancing just like Claudia, and her new older cousin, who allowed her to experience, once again, that same old feeling she had experienced in the company of Alex and Sophie back in Nova Scotia.

*It was like, "ok, somebody is gonna take care of me now...somebody is gonna watch out for me", which was great.*

It was inevitable that Claudia would notice the obvious differences between the large homes and expansive outdoors she grew up with in Nova Scotia, where she lived in acreages and small towns, and the reality of living in one of Canada's largest cities. The financial demands on the family would also become very obvious to Claudia as she no longer had the outdoors for entertainment and found herself seeking fun activities that required money the family did not have.

*[In Nova Scotia] everything was just a little bit cheaper. And also, we had the outdoors to go and play; we didn't have concrete jungle like in Edmonton. So we could just go outside*

*and play and amuse ourselves... [In Edmonton] it was more expensive for us to enjoy ourselves ... I think it kind of came to the forefront that we weren't the most well off people... I didn't really notice it, because, you know, I'd just go outside and play when I was in Nova Scotia. But when I moved here, it was totally different.*

Claudia remembers, “*It was kind of hard going*”. Her mother was quite stressed because she had to work late, and they were now living in a much smaller home. Claudia had to share a bedroom and a bed with her seven-year-old sister, babysitting her siblings had become challenging because her brother and sister were trying to exercise their independence, and Claudia had to adjust to the loss of privacy and space. “*We were all at each other's faces and it wasn't a good thing*”, she commented. Dealing with her siblings' constant arguments in a small space at the same time as she had a lot more homework to do also proved to be quite challenging for Claudia, and in addition, she also continued trying to keep things at home organized and under control to facilitate things for her mother.

*I was in a new place, school was getting harder, and I'm just like, “Ah! Can't deal with everything right now! I don't want to deal with my sister and brother fighting with each other”.*

Eventually she was able to solve some of these issues by setting up her own bedroom in the basement, in much the same way she had throughout her several homes, with all her Barbies and trinkets put in their own place, and with a new and exciting waterbed, which became Claudia's favourite bed to this day.

Claudia's first home in the big city was within walking distance to her elementary school, so she no longer had to fear missing the school bus. However, she felt the need to learn her way around her neighbourhood as soon as they moved, and as she made friends in school and played together with them, she was able to be introduced to other areas around her school that she had not discovered on her own. When she started school, she was able to make friends right away,

and although some people appeared not to get along with certain other people, Claudia managed to stay away from conflicts and was accepting of everyone.

*I got along with everybody...I didn't discriminate against anybody. I talked to everybody. It was just like, that was the mode I was in from going to school in Minasville, "just talk to everybody because this is your class".*

*I don't know how I managed to make so many friends. I think it was just the fact that I wasn't quiet and would speak up in class. I asked people questions and kind of got involved. ...The kids were actually quite curious about me, because I came from so far away, so we had a lot to talk about.*

Keeping in touch with her old friends from Minasville proved to be difficult once again. She was able to keep in touch a little bit longer compared to her prior moves, because they had been friends for more than two years, but they were experiencing so many different things that they couldn't relate to each other anymore. So, slowly the relationships dissolved, except for one friend, who kept in touch until they were in grade twelve, making it the longest friendship Claudia had ever had.

*I knew we were so different now because we were living in different places, we were experiencing different things. And still at that age, like, in elementary school we didn't have much more to talk about than school. And the curriculum is different in Alberta and Nova Scotia, so I couldn't be like, "oh yeah, this was really hard", and they were like, "ah ... what are you talking about".*

*You can't make friends with somebody who lives half a country away from you unless you really keep in touch every day. And even then it's like, "ok, what are we going to talk about", kind of thing.*

Grade six was another successful academic year for Claudia, because she continued to do well despite all her moves and responsibilities at home. She found that she was ahead of everyone else in her class, both because of the education she had experienced in the previous years and because of her natural aptitude and dedication to her studies. Jokingly, she again called herself a "nerd", and remembered all the praise she received from her teachers during that year.

When Claudia changed schools for Junior High, her success continued as she joined an academic challenge program and was self-motivated to always do better.

After her arrival in Edmonton, Claudia had more moves ahead of her, but as the years progressed the changes of homes became less important than the relationship issues she experienced or the traumatic events that took place within her family. It is only natural, then, that Claudia would later see those years as lessons on becoming an adult, moving from all the troubles she faced in Junior High, through the reality of dealing with emotional issues while working, studying, and planning a career during high school, and finally reaching the grown up stage, when, despite her fears, she felt she was ready to enter university.

It was in grade seven that she made up her mind about a career choice, and all the work she did in school from grade seven all the way to grade twelve was directed at completing all the requirements to follow her career path, and at getting the best possible marks she could. As she remembered, *“At the age of thirteen I had everything planned out of what I need to do”*. When she entered the academic challenge program in her school, she continued to push herself to do better and better, as she admitted, *“It was important for me to do very well”*. At that time, Claudia still had her responsibilities at home, feeling responsible for raising her siblings and for making things easier for her mother at home. For the first two weeks of grade seven, Claudia feared getting lost on the way to school, because she had to use the public bus system to get to her new school, so she convinced a friend to help her out. In addition to starting a new school year in a new school, the responsibilities at home, and Claudia’s determination to do well academically to pursue her career dream, Claudia also became involved with cheerleading at a competitive level, which added to the demands in her life. Juggling all these things was becoming too much for her.

*I was like, "well, I have all this other stuff that I need to do. I don't wanna do so much at home anymore". But I still had to. It was very frustrating... You know, for a twelve year old, it's a bit much.*

It was especially difficult when she would see her friends going out together to do fun things, when she had to stay home to take care of her siblings. Claudia ended up spending a lot of time at school, where she had the space and peace of mind she needed to do her work.

Junior high started with Claudia losing touch with her best friend from grade six, and with Claudia's parents' short-lived split, when her father moved back to Nova Scotia for about a month. Claudia was very angry with her father at that time, and she felt very sorry about the misunderstanding she had with her best friend and their eventual separation because they went to different schools. Family life became even more stressful in the latter part of grade eight, when her father became ill and had to go away for treatment. Claudia's mom became increasingly anxious and irritable during that time, despite the success of the cancer treatment her father received. It was sometime during her grade eight year, when Claudia was around thirteen, that Claudia's family moved to their second home in Edmonton. Claudia's story, though, was not interrupted by this move, as she continued to describe a major change in her life that took place in grade nine.

*I had kind of a rough time in Junior High with friends. That's the only time I never really made any friends, which was hard for me after moving to so many different places and making friends no problem. I made friends as soon as I started talking to people, right? But Junior High, it was just ... (...). It was hard to make friends with everybody in my class. Like, not everybody liked me. First two years wasn't bad; like, grade seven I made a lot of friends and I still keep in touch with most of them. In grade eight we were still pretty good friends, but then...*

It was in grade nine that after a series of events Claudia found herself with very few friends, and a large group of old friends who no longer liked her, which made Claudia feel miserable, alone, and depressed. Claudia believes that the fact that she was doing so well in school created a distance between her and her friends, who were not doing as well. Some friends



became interested in drinking and being popular; others were interested in being friends with only a select few. As they stopped having things in common, and they stopped talking to each other, different groups were formed apart from Claudia. And as old friends were unable to keep secrets from new friends, relationship circles changed. Claudia did have a couple of friends as support, but the large shift in friendships that she had to endure that year contrasted so blatantly with her years of close friendships in Nova Scotia that she found it very distressing.

*It was hard for me because I wasn't used to that. Like, I wasn't used to people not liking me like that and being so mean about it. (...). Grade nine was not fun for me at all.*

Despite her success in cheerleading and at school, Claudia didn't know what to do in relation to her isolation at school.

*I thought I was doing something wrong, so I just wouldn't say anything.*

*My mom definitely saw a marked difference in me, because I used to tell her everything. And then grade nine, grade ten, she was like, "you're not telling me anything".*

*I bottled it up big time. I stopped sleeping I got insomnia. And, I was sad more of the time. Kind of spent a lot of the time alone like that.*

When grade ten started, Claudia had moved once again, to a third home in Edmonton, to the house next door. She proudly related the fact she actually had to pack and unpack everything by herself, because her mother was visiting her aunt in Nova Scotia. Although the moves didn't change Claudia's experiences at school, she remembered her concerns during those days.

*I knew things were going badly around the house, like with bills and stuff like that. And, it was kind of like, "oh, I wonder how my parents are doing with the rent", kind of thing. So, I knew it [the move] was coming and then we'd be like, "ok, we're moving". I'm like, "oh, alright, sure".*

Claudia accepted the financial needs of the family, but the physical challenges associated with a move, along with the instability of moving constantly added to the demands she had both at home and at school. Although Claudia experienced academic success and continued to win

cheerleading competitions throughout Junior High, her friendship difficulties at school added to what she was experiencing at home.

After completing an arduous grade nine, Claudia switched schools to start her first year of high school. She had chosen to go to a different school than most of her classmates were going to, because she had no longer wanted to be in the company of people who disliked her. Grade ten started with few friends, and Claudia decided that was how she wanted to keep her friendship circle. She continued cheerleading during the next couple of years, but it was very frustrating for her that despite how hard she worked, the team was not winning any competitions the way she was used to winning in Junior High. In addition, friendships within cheerleading were strenuous as well, which validated her decision to keep only a few close friends. Again, Claudia was reminded of her background as she compared herself to those on her cheerleading team.

*All those things where I said I didn't want to make new friends because everybody was so cruel and cliquy, that really came about in grade eleven in cheerleading. Because, I mean, most of the girls had money, and they were very popular, and they were cheerleaders by every imagination, and I really wasn't. Like, I was just ... this isn't my personality. I was clashing with everybody. And I was just like, "this is not good". I had my friends on the team, and I tried to get along with everybody but there were people that I just didn't like and they didn't like me. And for no other reason than that we came from a different background. Which was, to me, ridiculous. From the way I was brought up, it was actually just stupid.*

Claudia was no longer the tomboyish and gregarious girl she had once been. With her involvement in cheerleading and now as a full-grown adolescent, she had been “girlyfied”, as she called it. Her experiences in grade nine had also led Claudia to become a lot quieter and more introspective. She still enjoyed the company of the few friends that she kept, but she would often choose to ride her bike by herself, or just read.

*I became a lot more of a loner. I did a lot more things on my own. (...). I'd call my friends to go to the mall, and go see movies and stuff like that, but I'd go outside by myself. I'd go and enjoy nature by myself and then just kind of go with my thoughts and think about things, you know.*

As Claudia continued trying to focus on her studies in grade ten, she also took on a job and started a long-term relationship, which lasted past her high school years. This was the first time Claudia was in love with anybody. Unfortunately the relationship caused a lot of stress for her and for her parents, because they thought he was not treating her well. Her father continued to be very supportive of her throughout the years, and his understanding was especially welcome at the time, because her mother continued to get upset over everything that happened at home.

Financial stress, her father's health, responsibilities at home, school and residential moves, sibling rivalry, conflicts with friends, dating problems... Everything that had been accumulating over the years could not have prepared Claudia for her mother's progressive irritability, anxiety, and depression, which culminated with a suicide attempt in the summer before her final school year. Claudia knew things weren't right with her mother. As she put it, *"Everything was so exaggerated, and just off the wall. It was pretty crazy"*, but she could not anticipate her mother's behaviour when she arrived home to find her mother locked in the bathroom. At seventeen years of age, it took Claudia a long time before she could share her feelings of guilt with anyone. Her mother was hospitalized and treated, and put on medication, but Claudia remained preoccupied with her mother's well-being and stress levels. A week after the suicide attempt, Claudia was furious when she once again found her mother locked in the bathroom. As a preventive measure she took her, once again, to the hospital despite her mother's complaints.

Claudia continued to feel responsible for managing emotions and stress levels around the house to protect her mother.

*I knew what was going on with my mom. I knew how much stress she was under. I knew what would happen if she broke. But my sister and brother were just like, "We'll do whatever we want", because they didn't know.*

Claudia decided to drop cheerleading and took on a dance course outside of school which, along with her studies, helped her clear her mind from the weight she carried on her shoulders for caring for her family at the same time as she was dealing with issues with her boyfriend.

*Instead of thinking about everything, I would be dancing or I would be doing homework. (...). I was getting pretty tired of having so much stress. Like, caring for my sister and brother, dealing with them going away every summer, dealing with my mom...*

As she tried to hold things together and felt the anxiety of preparing herself for university, Claudia allowed herself what seemed to be a first break from all that she had been dealing with, by taking a vacation with her boyfriend. Their relationship was to end a year later, but she fully enjoyed the peace and relaxation of being on a sunny warm beach outside of Canada.

Claudia's story went beyond her high school years, as she moved again just prior to starting university. This was her third move in Edmonton and she remembers thinking at that time, *"Oh, God, can we please just stay in one place so that I can concentrate on other things"*. Thinking back about all the moves they faced while in Edmonton, she added, *"It was too much for me. It was too much for my mom. It was too much for my sister and brother"*. And she continued moving even after she started university.

*I have lived in six different places up until now. (...). We just moved so much. I can't believe I just didn't crack, and my grades didn't fall, and ... It's surprising to me to see how well I handled everything.*

And so, as Claudia obtained loans and scholarships for university, she continued to seek stability. She moved in with a new boyfriend and continued to encourage her mother to stick with her medication. Claudia is very proud of her mother, her sister, and her brother, who were all able to pull things together and to do well in their interests in life. Her relationship with her stepfather is currently on hold, as he deals with his own personal issues away from the family once again. Claudia misses the supportive company of her stepfather and struggles with her ambivalence about helping him. Because she sees everyone else doing so well, and because she is finally

settling down, she just can't seem to find the energy to tackle another stress in her life at this juncture.

*I'm almost ... not blaming him, but I'm saying that he is responsible for us moving every month, or every couple of years. I don't want stress in my life anymore. It's like, I want stability and he's really not a stable person.*

*I've got an absolutely amazing boyfriend, I've got a good place to stay, my mom is happy, she's doing well, she's doing it on her own, she's a new kind of person. They've got a nice apartment now, it's not a piece of crap, it's affordable. My mom is making plans for the future, you know, planning things out and not just living month to month. So I'm thinking, "you know, everything is going so much better now. Do I really want my dad in my life to make things unstable again, and to put all that extra stress on me?"*

As Claudia looks back on her life story of moving frequently, she regrets not having a childhood friend who could have known her all her life, and she candidly exposes her feelings about her experiences as she compares her life with that of her friends.

*I've always been a little bit jealous, I guess, of my friends who got to stay in one place and kind of just live out their lives and not really have to worry about stuff. And, you know, not worry about, "Oh, am I gonna move next year? Am I gonna have to pack up? Am I gonna have a whole new room", kind of thing.*

Claudia's love and dedication to her family, above everything else in her life, is inspiring. Even after learning from her friends that she cannot fix everyone, Claudia still struggles with letting her mother and siblings make their own mistakes. Only now that they are doing well is Claudia able to finally relax and just watch them live their lives. As they reached stability in their lives, so has Claudia. She holds on to the hope that her father will also find his place back in the family, and that everyone will be able to hold on to this well deserved good moment in life.

### *Danielle's Story*

Danielle was born into a military family early in the Cold War years, in the late nineteen forties. When she was born, a day after her father's birthday, she joined the lives of her parents and seven-year-old brother. Five years and a day later, her sister would arrive, creating a unique stream of birthday celebrations in her house. Sadly, Danielle lamented that her father always had a cake to celebrate his birthday, but that she celebrated hers with leftovers, and her sister was always granted a new cake. And that's how it was for Danielle. She was the middle child in her family, and had her birthday between her father's and sister's.

As was common at the time, her father ruled the house. Although Danielle holds good memories of ice-skating with her father during the winter months in Ontario, when she was a teenager, their relationship was not a strong one while she was growing up. *"My father was not a nurturing person"*, she commented, *"He ordered everyone around"*. As the head of the house, he always had the best servings of food, the first bath, and control of the television, when they finally had one in her teenage years.

*I didn't have a close and loving nurturing relationship father to daughter. And part of that is his personality, his sense of humour, the fact that he was in the army and gone a lot. And men at that time thought that if they just brought home the paycheque at the end of the week that that was sufficient to their contribution within the family structure. I think that was fairly normal in European and North American backgrounds.*

On the other hand, her mother was *"always kind, and caring, and loving, and had patience"*. Danielle spoke with great tenderness as she remembered her emotional connection to her mother. *"I had a great relationship with her"*, she commented. The warmth and comfort she obtained from that relationship contrasted sharply with the conflicts she observed in her parent's lives and with her own disagreements with her father.

*There was verbal conflict. My dad always won, right or wrong. I hated listening to and even participating in that, but I did lock heads with my Dad often. I didn't like his attitude toward my mother and yet, she didn't stand up for herself either.*

Danielle described herself as a quiet, good looking, average kind of child. She was of average height and average weight, she enjoyed running and exercising, had good eye-hand coordination, and went to Brownies. But that wasn't all. Although she was expected to be quiet, which she was most of the time, there was more to Danielle than the eye could see.

*There was always a little rebel in me. (...). I was a quiet girl, but that's really not what I would have liked to have been like. I think... It kept getting... That aspect of my personality was not encouraged by my family.*

Although Danielle had two siblings and she did make some friends throughout her life, her story was marked by isolation. Because there was a large age difference between her and her older brother, they didn't develop a relationship until they were adults, when the age difference appeared unimportant. Danielle played with her younger sister, and protected her in the moves and on the playgrounds when needed, but the two of them fought a lot as children. There were no uncles, cousins, or grandparents in Danielle's story. No special neighbour, or special friend. Not even a special place to which Danielle felt attached. Her story reflects a series of moves and changes of schools with Danielle simply moving along as the situation required.

As Danielle was told by her mother, she moved often, even prior to starting school. As a young child, Danielle remembers her mother walking her to the nearby school within the military grounds where she completed kindergarten. Despite her father's ruling and the expectation of good behaviour, she humorously remembers the rebel inside her coming through in that first year in school. Despite the explicit rules in the household, Danielle managed to go into her father's bedroom and snoop around. She found a foil packet in her father's drawer, which turned out to be a condom. At the end of her half-day of school, when all the children were lined up waiting for dismissal, Danielle reached for that packet and opened it, and proceeded to blow up the "balloon" she had just discovered. She was hoping to impress the other children in her class. Danielle

remembers the embarrassment of being exposed by a maidenly school teacher who had immediately recognized what Danielle was holding in her hands, and how guilty she felt for having broken a household rule. She remembers her mother and older brother having a good laugh at her expense at the end of the school day when she arrived home and realised they already knew of the incident.

Her first school change came at the beginning of the next school year, when she was moved to another school located within the same military grounds. Danielle remembers vividly the fear she felt on her first day of school, when at lunchtime she had to find her own way back home.

*I was scared on the way to school in the morning. So scared that I clung desperately to my mother's hand and I did not remember the visual cues I needed to find my way back home. At lunchtime, I was really scared, but I found my way and quickly picked up on the visual cues for the afternoon trip back home.*

She stayed at that second school for almost two full school years, when in the spring of grade two she had to move again. Danielle has no memory of any teachers or any specific occasions from those two years. She was around eight years of age when she was pulled from that second school and later found herself on a train on the way to Montreal to board a boat to cross the Atlantic. The family was on its way to Germany, where they caught another train to reach their final destination, a Canadian military compound in Germany. At eight years of age, Danielle was unaware of the Canadian involvement in the post war negotiations in the middle of the Cold War, but she felt the tension that filled their cold motel room in Montreal, with the huge army presence commanding their every move as they waited to be shipped to Germany the following morning. As she lay in bed next to her sister, she could see through the opening of her bedroom door the tremendous anxiety shared by her mother and brother as they talked at the kitchenette table. As the light shone on her face, she listened to their conversations, noticing how



her mother had no control of the situation, and that in the absence of her husband, who had preceded the family to Germany, was trying to find support in Danielle's brother who was just a kid himself. That scene only increased Danielle's insecurity. There was fear in Danielle's recollection of that moment. "*Just fear! Just fear!*" she confessed, "*I thought they weren't in control*".

Her fears soon gave way to her new experiences on the ship.

*We got on the ship and I remember that most people were ill on the crossing over the sea. I was not. I enjoyed all the attention staff gave me. The shipboard staff loved me! I was given a badge, a sheriff badge from a box of cereal. I was allowed to visit the kitchens and I was taught by an attendant how to stop the elevator midway between decks so that no one could tell where the elevator really was. (...). It was like a big game, because we could ask the steward to bring us tea and biscuits anytime. The children had tea parties often...all the way across the Atlantic. My mother even bought me a plastic violin that was for sale onboard and I played that thing all journey long.*

The family moved into the Canadian military compound where Danielle's future school and new home were located. They moved into a third floor apartment, which was different for Danielle, because she had lived in homes up until then, and there they stayed for the course of the next two years. During those earlier years she remembers bonding with people very quickly, yet there were still many things she felt anxious about.

*The anxiety for me was the new curriculum, new teacher, new kids, new school, of course, new home, and totally new environment. Because it was mid year, I was the odd person out. (...) Kids have a lot of peer pressure and there are always the unpleasant children in the school that you avoid. (...). All of the other kids, at that time of the year, already knew who to avoid, what streets to walk down, what streets not to walk down because those guys walked down that street. I didn't know that. So I didn't have street smarts, and that was hard.*

Danielle finished grade two. With the arrival of summer, she made friends on the playground which facilitated her return to school in September. She stayed at that school until mid way through grade four, when she was about ten years old, when her father was transferred back to Canada. During those years, and only for the duration of her stay in Germany, Danielle

would wake up from time to time with either of her parents slapping, hitting, or spanking her. For no apparent reason, she would find herself under the harsh punishment of her parents, not knowing what she had done to deserve such treatment. Years later, when she had a daughter or her own, Danielle would understand the sleep walking behaviour of her daughter and finally understand what had elicited such response from her own parents when she was a child. Only then did she understand why they slapped her when she was caught trying to climb over the third floor balcony.

Besides the punishments she received in the middle of the night during her sleep walking episodes, Danielle remembers those were not pleasant years for her mother. In contrast, she does remember loving to observe and visit the friendly Gypsies who would arrive once a year in a nearby field with their coloured wagons and horses. Danielle loved their sense of enjoyment of life. She would later comment on her now well-developed appreciation for travel and different cultures, which she attributes to her experiences moving around.

*I loved the travelling. The act of traveling. ... I loved seeing new places. I loved seeing new cultures. I loved taking, tasting new foods. I loved all the art I saw in different places. I loved all the castles I saw, you know, my imagination was great.*

Everything else in Germany had been unremarkable during those years. No memories of specific teachers, or particular friends, or even the layout of the community. Her life must have been undisturbed by the military activities in Germany during those years, because the military presence had only been noticed prior to their move to Germany. She does remember, though, how difficult the transition back to Canada was for her.

*I had made friends in Germany; I remember the pain of leaving them behind. I don't remember the people, but I remember the emotional connection. My world got torn apart again. Some kids and their families moved at the same time I did. Others remained behind. I saw a few people I knew on board the ship. I never saw those friends again once our ship landed in Canada. I recall the sense of loss I felt when it was time to leave the ship. By that time, I had understood that none of the remaining classmates aboard were moving to the same city as I was.*

That was a turning point for Danielle with respect to friendships. At ten years of age she realised that the effort she had put in making friends in Germany was all for nothing, because now she had to move on to the next town, where she once again would have to face the anxiety of fitting in with a new group of children.

*I always was afraid of meeting new students in midyear. After my dad's two year posting in Germany, I did not bond with kids at all. It seems I entered new schools part way through the year. Then I felt left out, even on the playground, because the children in my class had already bonded together. I did better in the years that I started fresh in September and finished at the same school in June. But I think I only had one or two of those.*

Danielle realised at that time what life for army kids was like, having to follow their fathers wherever they went, and having to give up relationships each and every time a move came along. *“Even if we had made friendships, they couldn't last”*. It was a twofold realisation for Danielle, one that related to her willingness to put effort into making new friendships, and another that related to her willingness to let these relationships go. As the latter was forced upon her as a child, the former became a matter of personal choice, which facilitated the whole process.

*It was thrust upon me as a child. I was forced to let go. (...). Letting go wasn't hard. I learned after one experience with it.*

*That's when I saw that I had to limit the level of connection to people to keep from getting hurt when we parted.*

*I believe I have refrained from allowing friendships to deepen with anyone other than my family. Because I have continued to move from place to place even in adulthood, I keep relationships without much depth in order to protect myself from the losses I would otherwise feel at the next uprooting.*

There was nothing Danielle could do, but to simply follow her father. *“I just had to go”*, she added. *“ I just moved. And I have done it constantly, all my life. I adapt. That's the word. I just adapt”*. As her father followed the directions of the military, so did the family.

*He had a sense of security that his job gave him. The military took care of him. Beyond being transported to the next location my dad was to serve Canada, we and families like ourselves were left to flounder.*

And with this new sense of loss and self-protection, Danielle moved along to central Canada. Upon their arrival, the military had no homes available for them and therefore they had to live in a rented home in the community. In the meantime, Danielle joined school immediately. She felt like she had been just “thrown” into the nearest school.

*I felt like I was just a thing that kept getting picked up and deposited here and there without care for my well-being.*

Her feelings of insecurity increased as she was pulled from that school after only being there for two weeks, when the family moved to their permanent home and Danielle was transferred to a school nearby. Danielle remembers that her father was away from home all day long, and therefore unavailable to help the family feel secure in their new environment. She regrets not having been able to spend those two weeks at home with her mother.

*Staying at home would have been better for me than having been made to join a new class of kids, work with a new teacher in a new school with new rules of conduct and new curriculum, not to mention the need to memorize immediately the new geographical location of my home and school. Who cares about missing two weeks of school? I already missed one week traveling on a ship back to Canada*

All she remembers from those two weeks is that she was moved so soon thereafter. She doesn't remember teachers, kids, or the walk to and from school. As she moved to this second school in the prairies, Danielle did what she had to do. For her, it was just “another move, another place to be”. It was her third school during that year, but she was able to finish grade four out of that second school, and there she stayed until the end of grade six.

The rain poured down on her as she walked home for lunch one day. It is a clear memory of an uncertain time, probably the first day in one of the two schools she attended after her arrival in Canada. As Danielle remembers the rain, she comments on how unimportant it was relative to

the events that took place in school that day. It was her first day of school and she felt lost in the maze of corridors following the adult guiding her to the new classroom. Before she had a chance to learn the faces of her new teacher or classmates, Danielle found herself back in the hallways trying to follow this new group she was supposed to join. She entered the gym to find a line up for summersaults, and she eagerly stood in line waiting for her turn to show everyone how good she was at summersaults and cartwheels. Unfortunately, Danielle had joined the wrong group.

*In those days, teachers were allowed to grab and some teachers were rough. I got grabbed by the arm and hauled to the side of the gym. I got scolded as I recall. That teacher told me I didn't belong in her class. Eventually my teacher saw the disruption and came over to retrieve me. How sad for me. I had begun immediately to try to fit in and all that happened was an incident that showed me I did not fit in. It felt like a punishment.*

Danielle feels a great sadness as she recalls her earlier experiences, and as she empathises with children in general. The historical times Danielle lived through as a child come to the fore, as she discusses the treatment of children in the past contrasting it to the now. She moves back and forth between her as a child, and her role as an adult now, focusing on how she, as an adult, treats and sees children differently than the way she was allowed to be treated when young.

*That is not the way a child should have to go through the school year. These are not good memories. It's not the type of memories a child should have. I sincerely hope that such would not happen to a child moving from school to school these days. Today, children are thought of as persons not as objects without feelings. Times are different.*

As a mother and grandmother, Danielle sees the change and finds comfort in it.

*I think teachers, if they are not burdened with too high a student body, can watch out for problems that arise for children who are moved about a lot. They can help children to cope better. And as well, there are school counsellors and social referral systems to provide assistance. I don't know what measures there are for our Canadian Military families, but I would hope the same is true there.*

Trying to fit in school in Canada was different for Danielle. In Germany, all her classmates were army kids who also moved about often, unlike the schools she now attended, which was just part of the community, with kids who had been there before her arrival.

*There might have been one or two other military kids in my class, or maybe not. Even then, they wouldn't have been people I had known before. So that was hard.*

As it turned out, Danielle disliked most of the children in that school, observing that there were gangs of children, mostly made up of boys, whom she didn't want to be associated with. She suspects that they must have lived in a rougher, tougher sort of neighbourhood. “*I hated that school*”, she emphasised. She remembers the embarrassment she endured after asking questions in class and being laughed at by classmates and teachers. “*I must have asked a lot of questions that sounded stupid to my new classmates*”, observed Danielle as she remembered how difficult it was for her to get over the fear of asking questions, even as an adult.

What became apparent to Danielle was the academic difficulty she faced all the way through high school. She always managed to reach passing grades, but she wanted to do better. In those days, marks used to be displayed on the board for all to see in order of achievement, and Danielle remembers always being at the bottom of the list. She doesn't recall her parents ever caring when she would bring home her report card. “*They just signed it. That's it. They never gave praise for any subject that I got an A or B in either*”.

*My parents did not have big expectations for me in school. They didn't push academics AT ALL. They didn't encourage reading, or music appreciation, or any extracurricular activities, not even sports.*

Aware of the difficulties in examining the past from current days, Danielle suspects she could have done better in school if it had not been for the constant change of teachers, schools, and curriculum. Later in life, prior to having children and even later, when her own daughters attended university, Danielle was able to complete two different post-secondary degrees, which helped her to overcome feelings of low self-esteem.

Despite Danielle's love of art and athletic enthusiasm, she was never enrolled or encouraged to explore anything outside of school. She played seasonal sports with schoolmates at

school, or with her sister and other neighbours on the streets, but she was unable to find a setting where she could feel successful. School was hard, socially and academically, and there was nothing for her beyond that.

*My life was one of constantly moving, either city or school or both. Changing this and the next thing. I never had the opportunity of belonging to any extracurricular clubs like swimming or tennis or gymnastics. After school there was never anything like that for me.*

*There had never been extra curricular activities that I could shine in or be really good at no matter what community I lived in. If I had played the piano or become good at something like that, I could have felt pride in something I could do, even swimming, or anything like that. But there was nothing. For me there was only the 'education' that came from school curriculum wherever they were. I didn't shine there either. Ah..., so that was, ... that was tough...*

That wasn't everything, though, as Danielle observed the complexity of the events in her life that contributed to a life long struggle with low self-esteem. She observed neither of her parents were good role models for self-confidence, and this influence was exacerbated by the fact she had to face her father's ruling of the household on a daily basis. In addition, with each move she was faced with new teachers who ruled the classrooms, with a new social structure, which dictated her social standing, and with a new curriculum, which impacted her achievement.

Danielle remembers that her mother encouraged her "creative bent" at home by offering her pencils, crayons, and paper from her precious letter pad. As a preschooler, Danielle remembers wanting to be an artist, but it was only in grade seven that she would be exposed to an art class, which was a memorable event from her days in the prairies. Later in high school, Danielle would borrow money from her mother to pay for a correspondence art course, and when her own daughters were at university, Danielle was finally able to complete a degree in Fine Arts and become the artist she had been waiting to uncover. Her father's involvement with her creative side was limited to the marks he would make on her oil paintings, without her knowing

it. *“By the time I saw what he had done, it was too dry to scrape off and continue. He never apologized”*.

It became apparent to Danielle that part of her limited childhood experiences was due to the family’s tight financial situation. In retrospect she admits, *“I now understand that I was bereft of a lot”*. Danielle’s story represents a complex link of factors connecting her nomadic lifestyle with home environment, economic standing, academic achievement, personal choices, personality, and social structure, all within the context of the historical times she lived in.

As Danielle continued her elementary school years in the prairies, and as she tried to cope with the multitude of challenges, she would often disguise her fears and anxiety with what she called a “false bravado”. *“I had to put on a face just to survive some days, when on the inside I did not feel like that”*. The bravado would come on only during stressful times, in the context of arguing with her father, or in the context of new schools, no friends, mourning of old friends, new and confusing curriculum, and tests that she couldn’t possibly be ready to take. She remembers she had picked up from her father the most inappropriate sense of humour, a sarcastic sense of humour that would often hurt people’s feelings. Later in high school she would notice what she had been doing all along, as she started seeing the reaction on people’s faces as she interacted with them, as she tried to hide behind her self-assured shell.

*I probably got punished a lot for the false bravado. In the schools and maybe with the other kids and...In a way, ostracized, you know? “Don’t play with us”, or, you know, the “Go sit on the chair in the, at the ... principal’s office”. That kind of thing. I’m trying to think if I... Was I doing it to seek attention but not in a negative way? Just ... attempting to raise my profile somehow?...To be noticed?...To fit in with the group? Ah... and maybe to disguise that I was afraid. You know? I put on the opposite face, maybe, so that others wouldn’t really see the one that’s inside.*

She remembers a couple of teachers from grade six, but no one particularly meaningful. Her first and only friend from those days in the prairies was developed when she moved, once again, to a new school. It was a new junior high school, which was even closer to her home. This



was a much easier change for Danielle, because she felt “*the playing field was all new territory for every child*”, herself included, as no one student had the advantage of having been there before. As she recalls it, “*it was a relatively stress free year*”, and the principal was a very kind elderly woman. She doesn’t recall anything in particular about her schooling that year, except for the fact that she just loved her art classes, which became her first memory of ever enjoying any subject in school.

Danielle remembers spending several months with her new friend, a poor and unpopular girl who lived with a single working mother. At lunchtime, Danielle would go over to her friend’s house and try out her mother’s make up. She was fascinated by all the eyeliners, mascaras, and bright lipsticks her friend’s mom had, which was very different from her own mother. As Danielle continued her story, she remembered, with a smile on her face, the times when she would buy freshly roasted nuts in the local drugstore, using her own allowance money. “*Those were nice things*”, she added. She also humorously recalled the time when the rebel inside her convinced her mother to dye her hair with a package of hair colour she bought with her own money. Danielle laughed as she recalled being around twelve years of age and deceiving her mother into thinking the hair dye would wash off.

When summer arrived at the end of grade seven, Danielle left the prairies and followed her father once again, this time to a much larger city in Ontario. Because Ontario had thirteen grades in those days, the staff at her new school suggested she be placed in grade nine with students who were a year older than she was. As it turned out, Danielle felt so far behind everyone else academically that year. The curriculum was, once again, very different, and having skipped grade eight entirely was a deficit she had to cope with.

*It was a difficult year for me since I was going through puberty at the same time as being in school with kids a year older than me and adjusting to a new city and community.*

Although Danielle disliked all her schooling, from elementary all the way to grade twelve, those years in Ontario were better than earlier ones. She enjoyed gymnastics and the variety of sports she was introduced to as part of the curriculum. She was also able to develop a couple of good friends in high school, one of whom remains to this day. This close friend happened to live near Danielle's home and they both took the same bus to school every day. When Danielle had to switch schools for the last time at the beginning of grade ten, this friend came to the same school with her. They shared many similarities, including their love for music. She was a "*comfort friend*", as Danielle put it. During those days, Danielle would spend time going to the library or going to her friend's house to listen to music. As she lived in the suburbs and finances were tight, she could only occasionally afford to take the bus for shopping trips. She does remember going with a friend to sit at the local lakefront beach or to local outdoor pools to swim during the summer time, and the odd pyjama party. It was during those days, that Danielle would go ice-skating with her father, a memory that brings a positive element to her relationship with him.

In grade nine, Danielle didn't particularly try to fit in. As she moved to her new school at the beginning of grade ten, her eighth change of school, Danielle felt, once again, the change in social structures, as everyone was new in the school and as she put it, "*the students had not preformed their little cliques*", and she was able to find a group that she felt comfortable to be around. Upon her arrival in Ontario, Danielle ignored her community, seeing it as just one of many in her life. She was able to learn her way around the city by bus, and family life remained unchanged for her, despite the fact that her brother had moved out on his own.

Despite her parents' reservations and her struggles in school, Danielle continued in the academic stream.

*My parents didn't even want me to be in the academic stream at school. They were both secretaries and they thought the commercial stream was good enough for me. But it wasn't good enough for me. I knew I would struggle with the academics of physics and math and sciences, but that was still what I wanted to do.*

And so, the rebel, or the bravado, pushed Danielle forward into continuing her schooling. When grade ten arrived, along with the changes introduced with the metric system, Danielle ended up having to repeat math, which for her was very humiliating, especially in the context that most of her friends at that time were doing pretty well in school.

She continued to dislike school all the way to the end, despite the new positive experiences.

*If you were to ask me how I liked high school, or how I liked all of my schooling, I would have to say I didn't like it at all. I hated high school. I did not like the way teachers treated the students. I wanted more respect than I got. I wanted more respect for myself and other students than we got.*

Danielle regretfully looks back at her schooling years as she furthers her views of how children should be treated.

*Can you imagine? I think ALL teachers should be giving a great deal of respect to their students. What a sad thing it is that, even in those days, I had to wait until I got to grade twelve where there was one teacher who didn't see me as a stupid adolescent dork. You know, a goofy child, a child adult. But actually looked beyond what my age was, whether I had pimples on my face or whatever, and saw a person. While we had different levels of education, I was still related to him at the level of an equal.*

The anxiety for Danielle in those later years in high school was related to upcoming choices she was forced to make as she realized her parents were making plans to move once again, and it was clear to Danielle that she was not part of those plans. As she recalls, “*I distinctively got the feeling that they wanted me to get out and get a job right after grade 12*”. Danielle's headaches increased with her anxiety; she began to have migraines because she felt her parents had not prepared her for adult life and the responsibilities that came with it. She had never had a job, or a bank account. Her only experience, which she remembers fondly, was the

volunteer work for individuals with intellectual disabilities. And here she was, on her own, in grade twelve, without any skills and having to find a way to face the world.

And once again, Danielle just moved on. While still living at home, she managed to find a very good career path that allowed her to study and earn some money at the same time, part of which she had to share with her parents as room and board. It was during her last training year that Danielle met her future husband, and they married that same year, just a week prior to her parents leaving Ontario.

It was in her adult years that Danielle took control over her course in life. Having a family of her own was a natural choice. A family of her own was expected to provide Danielle with the closeness, attachment, and love for one another that she longed for, a feeling of belonging and fitting in that had been missing from her life.

*Not having close relationships, extended relationships that I could go to, I thought, “ok, well, I’m gonna build me my own”.*

Danielle not only loved her husband, but she admired him also, because he was a highly educated man. He was from a different cultural and religious background, which she found quite exciting. Her enjoyment of different cultures and travel, obtained throughout her life, continued to take her and her family to different places. In her own words, *“It refreshes all my thinking again, to be in different places”*. That being said, she always tried to provide stability for her four children, keeping her kids in the same school as long as possible, trying to limit moves primarily to times when her children were moving from elementary school to junior high, or junior high to high school, those times when children in the community would also be transferring to different schools.

As Danielle imbued their lives with exciting travels, she also made sure her four children would be encouraged and supported through their education, and that they would recognise their

self-worth academically. Feeling very unprepared to take on the responsibility of being an adult when she finished her studies, Danielle became a very creative and supportive mother, leading her four children towards independence in various ways. As a mother, she insisted they did their own laundry, managed their own bank accounts, purchased their own clothes at the beginning of each school year (with pre-set funds given to them), and took on part time jobs. Money management, time management, self-reliance, pride in self-choices. Examining her role as a mother, Danielle stated:

*I really considered the 'at home' job that I did with those four people was really important, when I looked at it in context to what happened to me growing up. How much, how much different I wanted it to be for them. And I think they were prepared to start their own independent lives when they left for university, each in his or her own time.*

With respect to friendships, Danielle tried many times to maintain close friends from afar, but her attempts were not met with the same dedication she delivered, and she has come to believe that long distance relationships aren't possible.

*I CAN'T have long distance relationships. I need one-on-one time together. I need to see what faces are doing. I need to empathise with their pain when they have it. I can misinterpret emotion when it's in writing, but I can't when you're reading body language because I can immediately ask for clarification if needed. And if I don't have that, then it's only logical that relationships sort of separate. And at some point one or the other person has to let go.*

Danielle manages relationships to the best of her ability, knowing how to build relationships that are comfortably personal, never deep, but as close as she feels she can get to others. It's "sort of a self-preservation instinct that I have", she adds, referring to how she guards herself from being hurt at the loss of relationships. Close relationships are reserved to only a special few in her life. Although saddened to see that her children have taken different paths in life and are not the tight knit family she had envisioned for herself, Danielle is able to laugh at how, despite their affection for each other, they have ended up living separate lives.

In between her travels and the art classes she teaches, Danielle makes time for the precious few she has in her life. Confidently, she continues to explore the world and her creative side, participating in a positive way in the life of her granddaughter. Throughout her adult years, and even now alone with her husband, Danielle continues to move. She currently finds herself once again in yet a new city, and excited to discover all that it has to offer. Will this be her last move? Maybe. Maybe not.

## *Leona's Story*

Life for Leona started when she was eighteen years old. The years prior to College are and have always been considered as just steps towards the beginning of her life.

*I think from elementary, in my mind, I always thought, "this is just the crap you have to go through before you can actually go to College, go to University, where it's a lot more open, a lot more accepting".*

Although much happened in the several years leading up to the day she entered College, Leona is ready to acknowledge that she just does not remember much. *"It really is quite a big blur"*, she commented, *"I barely remember it"*.

*My memory block is basically just from college on. I kept every single birthday card, and Christmas card, and all my little memory of events from those days, but I haven't kept any mementos from kindergarten to grade twelve. It's like they've never really existed for me. 'Cause it wasn't... in my mind, I was like, "This is not my life. This is something that I have to just do, and then I will carry on".*

*Would I call my elementary and high school years my building blocks? No. I think it is just one long step, or even just ... like when you're almost waking up from a dream or from sleep. You know? You're almost hitting reality, going back to reality. That's what I would sort of classify my elementary to high school years, as almost living outside of reality. Then my reality happened when my voice started to come without hesitation and my personality came without hesitation. Like, who I am, I am to everyone. But in high school and junior high, you are different things to different people, or else you couldn't be who you wanted to be at that time. ... Those were my sleeping years and then when I went to College away on my own and took ownership of my life, those were my building blocks. Like, my building block was college, my second step was university, my third step was my first year working at my career, you know? Like, then being five years into my career. You know? Then it's gonna be ten years in a couple more years. You know, those are the steps I think are more valuable. Because I really don't have a clear memory of the years prior to college, and I think the reason why is because I have probably gotten hurt within them. So, probably there is a reason why I don't remember things clearly.*

When Leona was born with a cleft palate in the early seventies, the medical community had several surgical procedures that were being used to ameliorate the difficulties associated with a cleft palate. Therefore, Leona was subjected to several surgeries to repair her palate and to improve her appearance in her early years. These procedures started when she was just an infant and culminated with a major reconstructive surgery when she was five years old. At age five,

Leona was told that she would have to wait another ten or so years, until her physical development was complete, before she could subject herself to yet another plastic surgery to reduce the visible remaining vestiges of a cleft palate.

Despite Leona's leadership, athletic, and intellectual abilities, her social life was dramatically impacted by her physical appearance.

*I had a different nose and lip shape. So, you know, I was different. And even though I was able to, ... I was very good in sports, I played on all the school teams, my academics were very good, and ... But... because I looked different and I wasn't like everyone else physically, that put a big mark.*

Despite the bullying that Leona endured throughout her schooling years, fitting in after each move during her elementary school years was much easier than during secondary grades. In elementary school, as she recalled, *"It didn't last as long. You know, everyone got teased and bullied, but I think it was more equal. I think there was more..., you know, it didn't last months and months, day in and day out for months"*.

*In elementary, I think kids were a lot more accepting of cleft palate and all. I had a cleft palate, or I have a cleft palate, you know. I looked different, but they were more accepting. You are able to drop in and you are able to play right away. But then once you start getting into grade seven and plot forward, you know, people already have their own ideals of what is a perfect human being, you know, what is popular, what is this and that.*

*I think it is easier to move in those grades, because kids are so accepting. So if you can kick the ball far in kickball, you are totally in. You know, people want you in their team. You know? And if you are really good in the math games, all of a sudden you're cool because you are good at math. I think the elementary school teachers are better equipped, I think, to handle in a positive situation. Like, the classroom is more positive.*

When Leona was old enough to start school at the age of five, her only brother was around two years old. The family lived in a small northern community in Saskatchewan at that time, and before the school year was over, the four of them moved to a bigger city, still in northern Saskatchewan, where they stayed until Leona was part way through grade one. All she remembers from those days is that for a while they lived in a vast, old Victorian house with a



tennis court. According to Leona, at that time her father was well on his way to becoming a very young millionaire, but for some reason he went bankrupt, something that was never openly discussed in the family. However, the decline in financial standing did not seem to affect Leona's life. She commented, *"I was like, five. I figure I was in grade one. It didn't really matter. I got stuff"*.

Before grade one was over, Leona moved with her family to an even larger city, this time in the province of Manitoba. When grade two started, Leona found herself in yet another city, a remote northern community in Manitoba, and finished the grade on an Indian Reserve. Frequent relocations continued to be the norm for Leona in grade three, when she began the school year on the Indian Reserve, moved back to the high north, and then relocated a third time to British Columbia, to the Okanagan Valley. By the end of grade three, when Leona was nine years old, she had already lived in three different provinces and attended seven different schools in seven different cities.

Leona remembers very little of each town or city she lived in during her early years on the prairies. She remembers that her mother tried to keep things consistent for her and her brother by signing them up for Brownies and Beavers or other activities the community could offer.

*My mom always got together, making sure we were participating in the softball, the soccer, you know, the sports within the community. Not only in the school, but also the community teams. You know, took us to swimming lessons and such. You know, tried to make us fit in and sort of get all of the experience so we are not just moving and not really getting to ... get skills, I gues.*

Leona amusingly remembers going through a lying phase in grade two and the time she was scolded for telling a lie during a Brownie meeting. She also remembers her very first curling game, in the remote northern community in Manitoba, and the time she and her brother were able to climb up a snowdrift so tall that they could easily reach the top of their garage and slide down with their sleds. It was also in grade three, when Leona celebrated her ninth birthday, that she and

her brother excitedly shared all ten unclaimed treat bags from her party, as none of the ten guests had showed up for her celebration. Leona commented, “*My mom was heartbroken, but ... I lamented, ‘oh, no one came. That’s fine’*”.

*I think it really didn’t bother me, because I thought, “oh, great, I get ten goody bags”. I was like, I knew what was in the goody bags, there was candy in there. So my brother was there, and we just played. And I think in grade three, I didn’t really feel that it was that big of a deal. But my mom, I think, was very upset.*

Although Leona was not bothered by the lack of guests at her celebration, and she mostly remembers being a happy child, she is often reminded by her beloved aunts of the troubles she had to endure as a child.

*I just remember just being a happy kid and whatever. But they’re like, “no, you were not a happy kid”(…) But I guess, I think I probably was hurt through the school ground in elementary as well, like being picked on. But I really don’t remember it. I do remember coming home crying one afternoon and just upset. And my mom said to me, “well, you don’t ever let them see you cry, because then that just gives you more stuff to make you hurt more”. And so that was the last time I cried in the school ground. But I was in grade two or three. I’m not sure, was that because of my cleft palate or was that because it was just my week to be picked on? Because I think it does cycle through. Like, who is the nerd, or the cooties, or whatever, you know. I think in elementary school you cycle through who’s out that week. But, I think you’re easily forgiven or let back in, or more easily in elementary. (…) From that point I let a lot of my emotions bottle up inside and just sort of, “ah, that happens”. And then maybe not let it out for many years. Or let it out differently. Maybe not in a healthy way until, I think, I learned to communicate better, instead of acting out with little pinches or, you know, really biting words. Just let it out in a more healthy way and start healing from that, I think.*

*I was a hellion, as they said, because I acted out quite a bit. But I don’t remember acting out, but they remember me acting out with little pinches, and very sarcastic, and very hurtful remarks. I thought that I was being funny but I wasn’t. It wasn’t until I started realizing that that kind of stuff was hurting people... But I don’t remember this, really. It’s just in the last couple of years that I started to talk about it.*

Despite her aunt’s observations, Leona considered herself a very serious child, one who was beyond her years.

*I always saw myself as having an adult voice in my head. Like, I knew I was doing something childish, but I knew in the back of my mind .... Like, “wow, you wouldn’t be doing this ...blah, blah, blah”. But, I remember just being always more aware that... I was a small adult. I was always very serious.*

It was around grade four or five that Leona started to notice that her physical appearance presented a challenge for her when trying to make new friends. From city to city, she always faced the initial difficulty of fitting in and being accepted, but she always managed to hide her pain and to forgive and to forget. That's what Leona did so well; she forgave and forgot. As time passed, she would eventually make friends, and the memory of a happy childhood would remain.

*Elementary, I don't remember a whole heck of a lot. I remember [it] always being positive throughout. I remember elementary being a positive thing and fun*

Leona has fond memories of the time she lived in British Columbia. After finishing grade three in the Okanagan Valley, she continued in the same city for the beginning of grade four, and later that school year she moved to a small northern community. In grade five, the same thing happened, but in reverse order, starting grade five in the northern community and finishing the grade back in the same city she had lived before in the Okanagan Valley. In those days, Leona was no longer shocked when her parents would tell her to pack up her belongings and get ready for a move. Relocation had become a normal part of her life. At that time, however, after each move Leona would wonder about when her next uprooting would take place.

*I always sort of wondered, "Well, this school I really like, and I hope I get to stay here long". But then mom and dad would just be like, "No, we are moving; we are gonna go here now". You know, so it was very hard to, ...not have, you know, essentially, "this is not gonna last long". Because my parents at that time were pretty structured with moving every year or every year and a half, or something like that.*

When Leona started grade six, still in the Okanagan Valley, that became the first time that Leona was able to start a school year with the same friends from the year before. Up until that point in time, Leona had always had to join a new school after students already knew each other. Grade six was also the first time in Leona's life that she was able to complete a full school year in the same community and in the same school. By eleven years of age and in her seventh year attending school, Leona had already moved eight times through seven different cities.

*For the very first time in grade six, I started and finished the school year in the same community I had been in for part of grade five. One grade, one school... That was in grade six. So I'd never had that experience before, so that was pretty good*

In Leona's words, "I didn't mind moving so much in elementary". "It was definitely easier to start school in the fall than moving half way through the year", she added. In those early school days, her biggest fear was getting lost on the way to school or not finding her way back home. In addition, Leona always found a lot of support from the teachers.

*A lot of the teachers that I had in northern communities and southern communities, like, they ... We had small class sizes then as well. But they always seemed to facilitate, you know, your buddy for the first week of school, so you'd feel that you were involved in a group and such. I really think the teachers in the elementary school system were a lot better suited to allow the new students to acclimatize to the new surroundings, seeing their strengths, making sure that they are feeling included.*

Despite her mother's anxiety prior to Leona's birthday parties, Leona did celebrate her birthdays in British Columbia, and her mother continued to encourage Leona and her brother to immerse themselves in community activities.

*Mom signed us up for pottery classes too. You know, taking us to swimming lessons. Like, she was always taking us everywhere kids grow up. Doing what some parents do for their kids, supporting them and making sure they are getting skills. If they like it, continue; if they don't, you know, you find a different stream. But it got harder, you know, moving so often into smaller communities where they had nothing, or bigger communities where both parents had to work and such. But, you know, they definitely tried to do their best.*

Leona loved her years in British Columbia. In northern British Columbia, they lived in a farmhouse in a small community. Leona remembers how small her classroom was and how easily she was able to make friends upon her arrival. As she explained, "My classroom had three grades in it. Small country school. It was hard not to fit in".

*I went to a small country school just outside of the town where I was in a class of, let's say, twenty, but that was in three grades. Grades four, five and six were all there. I think there was only fifty kids in the whole school, you know. So... but that was a lot of fun too. I probably would have enjoyed staying up there. I think any of my schools in my elementary years I would have just loved the opportunity to stay and grow with that group of friends and that school and town system.*

Her memories of living in the Okanagan Valley were just as positive. As Leona affirmed, *“In the Okanagan Valley in BC, I had a very good circle of girlfriends. Yeah. I had great friends, and a great school, and social balance. It was perfect. If I could’ve stayed there, it would’ve been great”*.

*I played all these great sports that you weren’t able to play up north so readily. We had a pool in the backyard, you know, it was like ... I had a great neighbourhood full of kids. Like, you know, you leave the house at 8:00 in the morning and you meet your friends on the street and you play baseball, you know, you get into trouble, you go play in the orchards and the surroundings. It was a really great time. I remember being very happy both times we moved back to the Okanagan Valley. The friends that I met there, and the schools that I attended were just fabulous, you know.*

Family life for Leona, however, was not as warm as the memories she holds from her experiences with her friends. Thinking back about her relationship with her parents, she stated, *“I think maybe as a child they weren’t as involved as they probably should have been”*. Looking back in those days, Leona is saddened by the memory that while many of her friends had their parents watching their baseball or softball practices and games, she had to ride her bike alone to the fields in the absence of her parents. As she explained, *“They didn’t really, you know, watch or cheer you on”*.

*They were always focused with our lives but, they were sort of, I always sort of had them separate because of new roads and the moving all the time, so I sort of had my own security walls up, I guess. So, you know, we were close but not, you know... it wasn’t constant. Like, they didn’t provide a constant surrounding to feel very secure and expanding and learning, I guess, in that environment.*

As for her relationship with her brother, they weren’t the best of friends, but they had a good relationship during Leona’s elementary school years.

*I remember when we lived in a farmhouse or some of the smaller towns, we did play together, you know, games and outside stuff. But, you know, we were three years apart, so it’s a fairly good age gap. We weren’t super close. Like, I see my cousins, Samantha and Dylan, they’re basically two years apart, but they’re best friends all the way. You know, so we didn’t have that relationship whatsoever. Never really had. We hung out together if we had no other choice.*

When summer arrived at the end of grade six, Leona went to spend her holidays with her relatives in Saskatchewan. As it turned out, Leona would return every summer after that grade six holiday to spend time with her aunts, grandparents, cousins, and all the friends her family had in that small lake community. She first started going for just a week or two, but later she would spend her entire summer in the company of her beloved relatives.

Life in Saskatchewan with her relatives and friends was wonderful.

*We always played cards, or else we moved out to the lake. You know, we always had people out, ALL the time. Over almost every... It felt like every night, but probably not. But, either just for suppers or coming out to play cards, or else we went around in the ski boat, or at... just playing outside or just hanging out.*

*Aunt Jean always had it seemed like a crowd of people around her. Well, she's a vivacious lady, it's always fun to be... And everyone and anyone is welcome at the cabin. You know, there's always room for one more. You know, it's just that kind of atmosphere. You know, a lot of laughter, and card playing and a lot of just conversation.*

Leona would always stay with her aunt Jean and uncle Frank, and her two cousins Jennie and Brad, but she would also spend a lot of time at her aunt Kelly's home. It was through Leona's involvement with her aunts that she started to develop more appropriate interpersonal behaviours, and to learn to show her emotions in a healthier way. *"My aunt Jean and my aunt Kelly are two key people for that. Always challenging me, even to this day"*.

*I think it is through my time there that I think my attitude and personality became, maybe, less aggressive. Because my aunt Jean and my aunt Kelly have said that I was a very aggressive little girl.*

Aunt Jean holds a special place in Leona's life, having provided her with *"constant unconditional love and support"*, while at the same time always challenging her to fully develop her ideas and belief system, and to think about life issues. According to Leona, *"we weren't just allowed to say 'yeah, I like that'. We always had to explain why. And she challenged you to think; so we were able to laugh and learn with her"*. Aunt Kelly was just as supportive. *"You always knew that aunt Kelly is always showing with her love and she is always laughing and*

*accepting, and thinking you're the most funniest person in the world. And, you know, everything you're gonna do is just great".*

Life at the lake was very simple and predictable, and filled with laughter, acceptance, and love. Her uncle Frank worked all day. Her cousin Brad was three years older, so he spent a lot of his time with his friends. So, aunt Jean would encourage Jennie to spend all her time with Leona, as they were both the same age. Despite the initial difficulties in establishing a friendship, the two cousins ended up spending a lot of time together. They would wake up every day around ten in the morning to the sound of CBC radio. They would prepare and eat their breakfast together, and then they would clean up after themselves before spending the rest of the day together babysitting their younger cousins or just playing.

*My cousin Jennie and I were forced into a friendship that's, you know... At first she didn't want to be... we weren't very friendly towards each other. But I don't remember that. Yeah. I don't remember that but she says, "Oh my God, we fought like cats and dogs". And I'm like, "Really? I don't remember that whatsoever!" She's always been like my protector a little bit too, and she also just, you know, she always included me and her friends, you know, and I felt good about that. You know, she calls me on my BS, but she laughed at my jokes, even though she doesn't think that I'm very funny. (...) We basically grew into sisters at an emotional level, even though we're just cousins. You know, it's because we had to because we spent so much time together as kids. We just grew up and we were always accepting of each other and of our choices.*

As for Brad, Leona's cousin, he was like her older brother, and Leona admired him and his friends and the relationship they shared.

*They were the kings of their schools. I've never seen that strong of a class before. You know, not only were they strong academically and socially, but they were also part of every sport club, the student council, and ... And if they thought you were just being stupid or girly girl, they told you. They didn't respect that. I learned from them to stand up and fight for what you think is correct and fight with tooth and nail until you succeed.*

That's what Leona's summers were like, surrounded by all the relatives who lived in the community and all the other relatives who were constantly coming in for a visit. It was a lot of routine in this very small and safe community, but *"it was good times all the time"*. But more

important than what she did in the company of these relatives and friends, were the bonds Leona developed, the acceptance she received, and the personal growth she experienced. These were important friends in Leona's life. As she indicated, "*they were such open and caring people*". Leona felt like she mattered to them. "*People wanted me there and enjoyed me being there*", she explained.

But at the end of every summer holiday, Leona had to return to school and to whatever city her parents were living at the time. At the end of this first holiday, when Leona returned home, it was another new town that Leona returned to, because her family was moving to northern Alberta. On the positive side, she was able to start school in the Fall, which she found easier than moving in the middle of the school year; but, truth be told, Leona hated this new community.

*It wasn't a very fun town. It seemed very oppressive, like, very dirty and grey. Very oppressive and very ... It wasn't a town someone could really thrive in. And then the neighbourhood we lived in wasn't the greatest neighbourhood either, but, that's because at that time it was the only house available to rent in town.*

After having had such a great experience in the Okanagan Valley, followed by a great summer holiday in Saskatchewan, this new city was difficult for Leona to accept. She was once again bullied by other children, but this time was different than earlier years. This time Leona felt isolated from everyone else, feeling like she was the only one to be picked on. That's when Leona started to look forward to her next surgery. "*Once I'm sixteen*", she thought to herself in those days, "*that's when I get my final surgery, then I'll look exactly like everyone else*". It was a difficult year for Leona, and she remembers herself becoming more introverted at that time. In hindsight she thinks that was not a good time to move.

*Grade seven, you know, we are just starting junior high and it's all new and you're not in one class anymore, you have to move around, so... I didn't really make a lot of friends. I didn't make hardly any friends in grade seven.*



*When you move into the junior high and high school, when you have one teacher who is teaching five or seven classes, you may be a new student to the school but he or she may not even know you are a new student, period. You know, so I think... And then also at that time, you know, even if they were to assign a person to show you around, I think, you know, is that person and their social standing in the school, is it..., will they accept you, will the other people accept you?*

*I hung out everyday after school at the boys and girls club, because that was fun. I played basketball, and I played pool, and I really felt safe there. But schoolwise, I did really well, but I didn't make really a whole heck of, I didn't make any friends really in that city. I made acquaintances that I was able to talk to with in classes and such, but no friends in grade seven. (...) Grade seven, honestly, I don't remember a name I went to school with at all. I don't even remember the school name. But I don't remember any of the school names either. Except for grade twelve. But yeah, grade seven, I basically went through that year, and yeah, I was happy to move actually.*

At that time, Leona's mother had decided to wait until the end of the school year before moving, so Leona had to endure a full school year in northern Alberta, and when summer arrived she was once again sent off to the lake in Saskatchewan.

*So that became my touchstone, my home town. So I was able to come back to something familiar every year, every summer, since I was like twelve years old to forward. So that was, I think, a really saving grace that I was able to come back to something that I knew that was routine. You know, I had my cousin Jennie, we had our friends, we had our cabin at the lake. We had, you know, all these great things that ... My aunt Jean never changed. Like, it's always, you know, the same house every time I came back. So it was always good to know to have that place that never changed and you are able to expand and grow there.*

When it was time for her return, near the beginning of grade eight, Leona was yet again in a new city. She was nearly fourteen years old and she had already lived in four provinces, and she was now being introduced to the ninth city and the tenth school in her nomadic life. Leona was faced once again with the same old feeling of not knowing anyone, or anything about her new school and her new city. Leona feared the experiences ahead of her. As she described her feelings in those days, *"I was scared. I wasn't gonna meet kids, people weren't gonna talk to me. It's like, will I have the best friend? Who will I eat lunch with? Who will I hang out at recess?"* Despite her fears, she was happy to have left the oppressive town she lived in during the past school year.

This new town in central Alberta presented new hope for Leona. *“I was happy to move there because I wanted a new change; because I just didn’t feel good in the other city”*.

Life in this new town proved to be a very *“good, positive experience”* for Leona. She loved her school and she fit in nicely, being able to develop a great group of friends.

*We moved into a really nice neighbourhood. I made a really good friend there, Sandra Jordansen, I remember her name. And we hung out every day, and we walked to school, and school was very fun. Actually, I would really have enjoyed staying in that town. Because I was starting to make some really good friends, and making some really good inroads into different groups. (...) So, that was a good year for school. Schoolwise and myself, I think. (...) I actually was starting to make friends, I was fitting in, I felt comfortable. Like I said, I knew where the Seven Eleven was, I knew how far to everything, I played on the school teams there and ... I was, like, in eight teams, so I had a very good social standing there.*

As Leona approached the end of the school year, she could only hope that she would continue in that school and finish junior high with all her friends. She was looking forward to being part of the senior student group and ruling the school, and then going to the same high school as her friends. But that didn’t happen. In fact, Leona would move again, and again, completing her twelve years of education with admirable report cards from thirteen different schools.

*I think my dad is the biggest driver of it. It seems like even though he could’ve survived and done very well in every town that we lived in, he was always looking somewhere hopefully would be different and better. He’s always been searching to, I don’t know for what, but, you know, he’s always searching and he’d hope the next town would be better, or the next job would be better, or the next scenario would be better. And it never was for him, but he basically dragged us around to 13 different schools, or myself to 13 different schools.*

Despite her hopes of creating more memories in that town in central Alberta, Leona had to move. This time, even further north than she had been before. The entire family once again packed up what they could bring of their personal belongings, disposed of the things they couldn’t take, and drove from central Alberta all the way to Yellowknife. *“I had to start all over again”*, she commented.

Leona wasn't the tough adolescent she tried to appear to be with her blue streaks in her hair. This move was heartbreaking for her. As they drove north on this gravel road, Leona experienced a mixture of emotions, such as anger, powerlessness, and sadness. Complacency would soon set in and she would tell herself, "*Ok, you're just gonna suck it up and just do it*", you know, "*you have no option here*".

*Moving up to Yellowknife, up to NWT, like, "what the hell are you doing!" Like, we drove all the way up there and it's like, a gravel road, and I'm like, "oh my God!". It was three days of travel up there. (...) I was sad the whole trip. I was very depressed.*

*I would've been going to grade nine with a group of friends, you know, not having to try to fit in or find new friends or anything like that. But now I've moved to Yellowknife, which is a very far north school, and you know, the northern schools are a little bit rougher, and it's a different town.*

In their new home, Leona once again followed her father's advice and organized her new room and precious books in order to make her space her own. Then, she prepared herself for the life ahead and the challenges of trying to fit in. In this new school, day after day, and week after week, Leona had to cope with bullying from other students. The bullying continued for months. Day in and day out, Leona would have to go to school and try to shield herself from the pain of isolation and bullying. "*I felt so depressed*", she explained, "*because you know, you go through every day, you're not talking or else you're getting bullied, ...biting comments because I had a cleft palate and I didn't look like every other girl*". Leona was taunted and teased, and at the end of each day, she would be emotionally drained and just about unable to do anything due to severe headaches.

*It just really sort of came full circle. Like, I just, it was like, "Oh! Another new school!" You know, "I have to fit in", "I don't look like the same as other people"... And it just got to me. It was just every day. You know, the comments.... There's nothing you... You know, it's hard, I think, for anyone to really understand why that was it, you know. But the comments and the bullying were just basically terrifying. Not terrifying like I'm afraid for my life, but just like ... Just devastating. And it just takes a real toll on you. And I think, realistically I do have that emotional scar today. You know, I'm still very sensitive about*

*everything, you know, my physical look, because of those years of constant bullying from the kids.*

Leona just didn't fit in. As she explained, "*Everyone had been going to school together for years. It was hard to break in*", and "*In grade nine I was the only kid who never drank or did drugs... you know, in my whole class*". Even though she excelled in school and was a talented athlete who actively participated in school sports, she wasn't happy with anything at all. Leona spent her days by herself, quietly attending school and pretending to have something to do during lunch hours. Reminiscing about her life in central Alberta, she added, "*If I would have stayed there I would've probably not have been the introvert that I was for probably the rest of my school days, like inside the school system*".

She read book after book, having three or four books started at the same time. And at home, she would stay in her own private bedroom, reading, watching movies, or playing video games. Her bedroom was the one place she felt safe.

*My bedroom was my sanctuary because it had all my books. You know, and it had... you know, it just had all my books. And that was my sanctuary, all my books. And I was able to get lost in these fantasy worlds, and experience different lives and thought patterns through books. So, you know, then I also had an aquarium a couple of times too. So, you know, dad and I would set up the aquarium and we'd say, "oh, we gotta get this kind of fish". You know, we'd take on these little projects. Then he'd come down to my room and just sort of, like, he'd watch my fish and just talk about life.*

Leona carried a very private life, even at home. Leona lived her life apart from her parents, whom she didn't see as supports, and from her brother, who at the time was becoming increasingly deviant.

*I started seeing him screw up all the time in school. And I was jealous of him being able to make friends in an hour, where it took me three months, and then we'd have to move again. So I was jealous of him that way, probably. So I started separating myself from him, you know. He was living his life and I was like, "whatever". And I was living my own life. So we were two separate people. And I was also separated from my mom and dad. Like, I always sort of did my own thing, and you know.... We were all living like roommates in the house. But I just sort of separated myself because that's what I needed*

*to do to get through. I didn't see my mom and dad as support as much to help me with my everyday stuff.*

*We weren't a lovey-dovey family, we weren't affectionate; and you know, they didn't really... I think they didn't really, maybe, pull everyone together as a support. Like, "we're having family time, this is what we're doing". It was like, we all ... you know, watched TV once in a while together, but other than that there was really... There was no "oh, we gotta do this together", you know, "no, you can't sulk". It was more like that. It was more separate lives.*

*With my mom and dad, it was very much where we hid our emotions. Like, my dad didn't want to see if I was upset or whatever, so I had to keep a lot of that stuff inside as well.*

There was no other school she could go to. Yellowknife was so far from everything else that she couldn't just go and see her friends from grade eight or visit her family in Saskatchewan. Leona's life felt so unbearable that suicide appeared to be the only way out. Her pain was so great, and the days were so long. Had she not finally made one friend at Christmas time, Leona isn't sure what direction her life would have taken. Although it was not customary in Leona's family to share feelings with each other, Leona finally was able to bear her heart to her parents. She commented, *"I wasn't happy at all, and they were very worried about me"*.

*I broke down in front of them, and I said "I can't, I am not sure I can handle much more of this". You know, basically the taunting and the bullying at the school, you know, I wasn't sure how much more I could really take. And I think, at that time, if things wouldn't have improved by Christmas, I would've probably been shipped to Saskatchewan to live with my aunt Jean.*

It was the unconditional support of her aunts that carried Leona through those four miserable months and the year she spent in northern Alberta. Leona felt their love and support no matter where in the country she was. She kept in touch with her aunts and her cousin Jennie by writing or phoning them from time to time, and every now and then her days would be brightened by beautiful notes of support and encouragement that she would receive from her aunt Jean. Her summers in Saskatchewan restored her energy and reaffirmed the notion that life within the school system *"wasn't real life"*.

*I had that in my mind. Like, “this is not real life, this is not”... Because I was always a little bit different. I was a little bit smarter. I was, you know, I was always able to catch on to concepts, I was a very good writer, I was very good in math and reading. You know, so I didn’t have to... like, it was just something I felt you just had to go through to get to the end point, which is your freedom of learning and living at eighteen.*

Life in Yellowknife did eventually improve for Leona. Finding a friend who appreciated her company, who wanted to spend time with her, changed Leona’s experience of Yellowknife completely. As she put it, “*You had people to talk to, you had people to share secrets with, and you know, just sort of... you’re just accepted*”.

*It was very horrible up until Christmas, and then after Christmas it was actually fun. You know, I was making friends and I was fitting in. All the people who were making fun of me at the very beginning of the year were now friends of mine, or acquaintances, essentially. So I was able to go through not ridiculed or tortured, you know, emotionally. (...) And they came to me for academic help. You know, and I was always on the A teams for all the sports and such.*

As it had happened many times before, Leona was able to forgive and carry on, despite the remaining scars. Leona’s forgiving nature, her sense of humour and intellectual and athletic abilities enhanced her ability to establish ties with those who eventually accepted her physical appearance. At the same time, her self-confident and independent personality allowed her to carry her days in the absence of friendships in her community.

*I was always, always on the fringe of the popular kids, you know. Like, I could hang out with them but I was also very introverted and I was able ... I am able to, I guess, entertain myself. Like, I don’t need people to have fun or being entertained. So, I’m like, “yeah, whatever”. So, once you get to know me, and you get passed the physical look of me, I guess, at that time, then I was totally accepted. Because, you know, I have a very dry sense of humour, and very fast, and ... so...(...) I think I am fairly funny. And that’s part of my charisma. One of my coping mechanisms is inappropriate humour, and I was able to laugh. And I think that carried... that was always encouraged and shining through, during my high school, junior high years, for sure. But only a select few who talked to me or I hung out with actually saw that side, otherwise you would never have thought I’d spoken in junior high or high school.*

When grade nine was over, Leona was able to start grade ten at the local high school with everyone else, but her relationship with her first friend in Yellowknife did not last. As her friend

became more and more involved with other students who were interested in drinking and drugs, Leona slowly separated herself from the relationship. All her other friendships at school remained superficial. Leona was able to talk to many of the students, and she was no longer emotionally abused, but her social life was never again like she once experienced in elementary school or in grade eight. Although Leona acknowledges that some of her letters to her aunts were quite “*dark and depressing*” during that year, Leona confesses that separating from the other students was not hard. Their interests were incompatible, she explained. On the one hand, the student community was largely involved with drugs, alcohol, and partying. On the other hand, she was reading advanced literature, discussing life’s major issues with her relatives in Saskatchewan, and thinking of her future, as her parents and relatives had encouraged her to do. Leona “*always had very forward thinking*” and thought of herself as “*very mature*”.

So Leona continued high school in Yellowknife, looking forward to her next plastic surgery prior to starting grade eleven, to summer with her family in Saskatchewan, and to the beginning of real life.

*I was fortunate enough to have my constant in Saskatchewan to keep reminding me “this is not how it really is”, you know. “It is better. Just suck it up and deal with it until you’re out of grade twelve”, or “deal with it until you can come home here for the summer”.*

As it turned out, Leona’s father came to her one day and suggested that she apply for a job at the local movie theatre. She took his advice and started working. Three evenings a week, and as many extra shifts as she could arrange to have, Leona had something to do. Instead of partying with friends who did not share her interests, Leona would be busy at work. She enjoyed her job and the people she worked with. She worked with other students from her school, and even though their relationship at school remained superficial, at work “*everyone was really friendly and interested*”.

*I think that sort of opened my eyes as well that school is such a strict structured setting that it doesn't allow people to be themselves and be friends with whom they really want to be friends with, because other people's opinions matter more than their own.*

When summer arrived, Leona was sixteen years of age and at the end of grade ten. She was ready to finally have the plastic surgery she had been waiting for so long. *"I thought that was just going to change my world"*. Sadly so, the results were not what Leona had been hoping for. *"That was a little sad for me"*, was all she added about her reaction to the surgery. Making use of her sense of humour, she retells her story.

*There was actually an improvement. So ... it was an improvement, and... But it wasn't a drastic... It wasn't ... Like, I really had... You know, you see the movies and the magazines that you have, and all of a sudden they look cute and perky, you know. So I got the nose job and... I went, you know... I was all excited, and this is what had happened. And I'm like, "this is not the cute perky nose I'm supposed to get"! It's like, "what?". So... but it was an improvement. It wasn't the ... I wasn't just turning into a model the next day. But I had the summer to basically just work it over.*

Again, Leona spent the entire summer at the lake in Saskatchewan and then returned to school in Yellowknife for grade eleven. At school, Leona spent most of her time by herself. As she explained, *"I was fine in my grade, but I wasn't fitting in"*. She continued to do well academically, and her work was always completed much sooner than required. There was no incentive or excitement for Leona to attend classes in those days. Aside for her involvement with computers, Leona did not see the need to attend classes; there was no challenge for her. She would finish all required work for her courses, and then she would spend time at the computer lab working on projects beyond her grade level assigned by a teacher who identified Leona's aptitude in that area. Even though her marks remained above average, the school principal and her parents were worried about her truancy. It was then, during the middle of that school year that Leona moved for the last time.



After two and a half years in Yellowknife, the longest stretch in any city Leona had lived in, Leona's parents sent her to Saskatoon. "Ok", she thought, "Another year and a half, and I can choose my own path".

*Moving to Saskatoon I wasn't really looking forward to it, because I had my own kind of system up in Yellowknife. But I was also a little bit excited to see if I could learn more advanced classes and such. But, and I thought... I didn't know what to expect moving to Saskatoon. All I knew was that it was not too far from the lake and I was very excited about that. And, you know, and it was a change and I was kind of tired of Yellowknife too because I knew I wasn't who I really was either.(...) I didn't have a lot of great friends, and, you know, plotting through kind of thing.*

After twelve relocations in thirteen years, Leona found herself living in Saskatoon and attending the thirteenth school in her student life. She lived with relatives until her parents moved down and arranged a house for them to live in. Leona continued to live her own life apart from her brother and her parents, and friendships at school were almost non-existent to the end of her school days.

Coming from a small northern school with sixty students in her class, and maybe 300 students in the whole school, her new school in Saskatoon was overwhelming, with 350 students in grade eleven alone, and over 1200 students in the entire school. With that large of a student body, Leona did not find the courage to try out for any of the sports teams. "There is no way I am gonna be able to do any of the sports here", she thought to herself.

*I just didn't have confidence. You know, I didn't speak, so I didn't feel, like... You look at all these beautiful people, who are popular and jocks, and I thought of my own self-image and I'm like, "I don't even belong to that group whatsoever". I didn't even try to get close to that group.*

At school Leona was able to fade into the background, and go in and out of classes almost unnoticed. She stated, "I was just basically ignored. I didn't fit into any social circle. I just showed up for school". There was no verbal abuse, no teasing, or shunning, and Leona continued

to be the same introvert she had become in junior high. She made no friends at all in high school.

*“It was complete isolation”, she added.*

*I still didn’t really talk at all during high school inside the classroom. I’d go either weeks or days without talking other than to a teacher. Even sometimes I’d go days without talking to anyone. But that was fine with me. I was just sort of, “oh, I’d like to talk to someone today”, you know, “will today be the day that I’ll talk to someone”?*

So Leona spent a lot of time with her relatives, becoming even closer to them.

*That’s basically who I hang out with on the weekends. You know, I didn’t have any good friends. I had acquaintances, essentially. My family is my source of strength, essentially. Yeah. I am who I am because of my family.*

Leona tried to continue her work in computer science, but soon became more interested in the arts program, photography, activism, and poetry writing. As lonely as she was in school, Leona continued to dread lunch breaks. She always felt compelled to find something to do so she wouldn’t look like she needed company, so the art lab became her “*life saver*”. That’s where she spent many of her lunch hours.

It was within the art group that Leona met students who shared similar interests as her own. They read their own poetry, they loved talking, and they were more open to people’s differences. Leona indicated, *“They were the only group who didn’t judge each other”*.

*I really was attracted to how they were thinking and the conversations that we were having because it did remind me a lot of my cousin Brad and his friends. You know, just talking about life and how things should be run, and the differences .... And I just felt them more open to myself and ... Like, I didn’t necessarily fit in with them, but I just really enjoyed spending time with them because it was a different social thing for me. I found it really comfortable and exciting. Again, I really don’t have any friends from that group.*

Although quiet most of the time, Leona would often speak when she had the opportunity to voice her opinion, especially in classes that she excelled in. In addition to her sense of humour, Leona identified in herself the determination and ability to defend her opinions. Today Leona recognises that she had a talent for leadership roles. According to Leona, she learned from her

family to fight for her beliefs, and she was blessed with excellent argumentative skills. As she commented, *“If I am able to speak to you face on face, I will usually end up getting my way somehow”*.

One social contact led to another, and one activity led to another. By the end of her stay in Saskatoon, Leona was able to look back and appreciate how much she had accomplished. Leona became involved with activism, she published poems, contributed to the yearbook, and led environmental campaigns.

*I was passionate about the environment at that time and the group of friends that I chose to be with, but not all the time, like they were more acquaintances than friends as such. But someone had to take the leadership role, and that’s very much part of my personality. I really wanted to be a leader or part of the power positions. You know, in school I was still in classes I was always one of the leaders. Like, for, you know, social studies. I always had an opinion and a very strong one, and I could argue well. So, I may have been an introvert, but I didn’t allow my beliefs to be second guessed or not heard. You know, I wasn’t a passive, I wasn’t a weak person, I just didn’t talk because I didn’t feel like I had to.*

Leona enjoyed the social life she had outside of school in Saskatoon. Unlike most students her age, Leona and her group of acquaintances would attend theatre performances, operas, ballets, and other cultural events. Living near the university in Saskatoon, seeing the beauty of the surrounding campus, and enjoying some of the cultural opportunities the city offered, Leona was excited about her future. She remembers thinking, *“Ok, this is a lifestyle that I’m gonna absolutely love! I can hardly wait to get there!”*

And so, graduation day arrived. Even with all the relocations and the challenges Leona faced within the school system, she completed each of the twelve grades successfully.

*Fortunately enough too that I was fairly smart. I had a high reading level, math skills and all that, so I was able to easily move within the education system and I didn’t really feel that I missed out gaps, because I could pick up the gap information really well. So, that was a benefit.*

A high school diploma meant nothing for Leona. Her experiences within the school system were not the most memorable. Except for the one computer teacher in Yellowknife, Leona had no connection with any other teacher or anyone for that matter within school. But she was the first one in her family to graduate; therefore it was important for her parents to see their daughter receiving her diploma. Leona agreed to participate in her convocation, but she chose not to attend the after grad party. She asked herself, “*Why? I don’t know anyone there. I don’t feel a connection. Why would I waste my time and go there?*”

*All my positive experiences have happened outside of the school system, essentially. You know, the summers at the cabin at the lake, or some of the different social experiences that I was able to get through my activism in Saskatoon. Nothing positive really happened in the school system in junior high or high school that I can really recall readily. I think it is the system and I think it’s the people who are within that system. Like, the majority of the people, not ... Like I said, I had one good memory of one good teacher in high school. You know, and then, one out of how many, though. That’s not a great ... I’ve been to so many high schools. (...) But everyone else did their job, but did they go above and beyond? Or did they lose their passion? It’s hard to know. Or is it the restrictiveness of such a structured and huge class size? You know, not enabling them to really do a good job.*

Graduation for Leona was the beginning of her future life, the life she had been waiting to start. The life that she believed would start when she entered college.

As Leona had hoped, college was the perfect setting for her to develop long lasting friendships, to connect with teachers, and to utilize her academic aptitude and leadership skills. In college, all students in her class were newcomers, and they all had similar academic interests. She was able to spend one-on-one time with professors, and to start and finish each academic year with the same students. Leona flourished in those two years. Later, during her university studies, she was able to continue the growth and learning she had longed for so many years.

Life for Leona had not been easy prior to her grade twelve graduation. She had to deal with the bullying, the loneliness, and the constant apprehension about fitting in. There were the challenges of being different, the lack of connection with her parents and her brother, the missed

birthday parties, the absent high school sweetheart, the unknown plans for sleep-overs. Leona's life had been filled with constant moves and the realization of their cost. As Leona concluded, "*It wasn't easy and I don't recommend moving to anyone. Like, you know, up to grade five, grade six, [it's ok, but after that] you're taking that chance to really robbing your child of a really good childhood, I think*". For Leona, the years after elementary school were especially challenging.

*You know, when I have friends who move now with kids, I say, "that's fine, you move all you can until about grade three, grade four, and after that I really wouldn't recommend moving". You know, especially at the last ages, [grades seven to twelve], I think. I would probably move just before junior high, after that, I really ... You'd have to have one good reason to move, to uproot your kid from that scenario. Because I think it is easier on people if they are able to, on teenagers, I think, from grade seven forward...If you are starting out at the same time, you're giving that child an opportunity to experience everything that they have to experience. Even to grade twelve. At least you're giving them a constant in their lives, whether it be home, family, just place. You know, you know where the Seven Eleven is, you know where the skating rink is, you know where everything is and you know how long it takes to walk there or bike there. You know that. So, to give that child a chance of constant in their lives is very valuable.*

Leona realizes that as she moved, she invariably left many mementos behind, as she would often wonder about the value of keeping these reminders of the people she had met or the places she had been. As her family drove away from each of their numerous homes, she left behind not only friends and place, but also memories she can no longer access.

*Being relocated every time, I don't remember any of the houses I lived in, really. You know, I remember, you know...Yeah, I lived in a couple of apartments, and I lived in a house with a pool, I lived in a big mansion in Saskatchewan with a basketball and tennis court in the backyard, but all the houses that are just ordinary in between I don't really have a clear recollection, so they don't have a history for me. So, I think moving around so much, you lose a history. You know, you're not connected to one space. So I think that's hard.*

But Leona created history through her summers at the lake, because that's where she believes she grew up. That house at the lake was her "saviour", her "home", her "touchstone". Years after her graduation, when her aunt finally sold her house in Saskatchewan, Leona realized that that's where her memories had been stored, in every room and every corner. "*Every piece of*

*the house had a memory associated with it. And so it was happy, and loving, and laughter, and tears, and arguing... The whole gamut of life was in that house”.*

As challenging as multiple relocations have been for Leona, she chooses to remember the good times, and to focus on her future. She embraces her past with acceptance and states concisely, *“I don’t regret it and I don’t judge it, I just accept it”*. With all the moves she experienced, she values the opportunity she had to see so many provinces and appreciates the person she has become. As she explained, *“I am who I am because of those experiences”*. Leona’s only regret is the loss of having a childhood friend, one who could have shared history with her.

Throughout her adult life, Leona has carefully placed in her life the constant piece that was absent while growing up. Despite many opportunities to change jobs or to move to other cities, Leona has chosen to remain in the same company she has been with since her university graduation. She has developed and maintained many connections with close friends, all of them formed during her post-secondary education and through her professional life. She carefully fills her life with activities she enjoys and people who bring her joy to her life. After finding her voice and the environment that allowed her to be who she really wanted to be, Leona succeeded in finding her place in life, a place where she no longer worries about acceptance or lunch breaks. She found a place where she is valued as a professional, a person, and a friend. Leona is finally settled.

*I have my friends, I know how far it is to the Seven Eleven, I know how far it is to my office and back, I know my favourite stores. You know, when people come into town I know where to take them for dinners and such. You know, I am able to explore within the city but yet not have the challenge of moving and having to know a whole new city. And I don’t really want to do that.*

As Leona emphatically declared, *“Life is just getting better”*.

## Chapter Five: Interview Processes and Individual Case Interpretation

### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I reflect on the stories from the previous chapter and the context from which these stories were created. How did Claudia, Danielle, and Leona approach this study and what can we learn from their stories? How did multiple relocations take place in the lives of these women? How did they interpret their own experiences of frequent relocations during their school years? What experiences were most important in the stories of their lives? What factors played a role in mediating their experiences as they adapted to each new environment? What meanings did they derive from their stories of growing up with repeated relocation and entering and exiting new communities, schools, and peer groups?

After reading each story in the previous chapter, you encountered the many events that took place in the participants' lives, as well as stories of how these events interacted with personal, academic, social, and family life processes. In this chapter, you are invited to visit my own exploration of the many facets of each story. As the product of an academic study rooted in a social constructionist epistemology, I have chosen to foreshadow each case interpretation with details of the interview context from which they were created. The goal is to highlight the process of the creation of these stories and to make the relational component transparent for the reader.

### *Researcher's Involvement*

Common to all interviews was my full presence in them, both as a researcher and as a person. As stated previously, I derived my interest in the topic of multiple geographical relocations from my personal encounter with the possibility of entering a nomadic lifestyle with my husband and our two children. Therefore, I approached each and every interview with my personal curiosity of the experience, meaning, and impact of multiple relocations. At the same time, these interviews were also part of my academic life as a graduate student. They represented

a major step in the completion of my Master's thesis, which is the last requirement in my graduate program.

As detailed earlier, I brought myself into each and every one of the six interviews. I was genuinely interested in the experiences of the participants. I laughed with them as they shared comic stories, I was touched by their stories of sorrow, and I expressed my admiration for the achievements they have conquered in their lives. I did not act as a counsellor. I simply participated in their telling of their stories and hoped to understand what life had been like for each of them as contemporary nomads.

### *Claudia's Narrative*

#### *Interview Process*

My relationship with Claudia started when she received a copy of the invitation to participate in this study through a large local university recreational group. Claudia was instantly drawn to the opportunity to tell her story of frequent relocations. Calling herself a Gypsy, she promptly contacted me via email and volunteered to participate. She was initially hoping to obtain university credits for her participation in the study, but the lack of compensation did not diminish her enthusiasm and dedication to this research. As it turned out, unbeknownst to either of us, we were both participating in a project associated with the university recreational group to which we both belonged. As our contact within that project was limited at that time, and I had not known Claudia prior to receiving her first email, I accepted Claudia's offer to join this research. Our contact within this study remained more central to our relationship than the casual encounters we had through the project within our recreational group.

Claudia is a very outgoing and vibrant young adult. As I later listened to her stories, I understood the role her personality played in connecting her with people wherever she went. Despite our age difference, Claudia consistently presented herself as a very open, positive, and



genuinely empathic person, demonstrating an interest in the things I was involved with and willing to share her stories with me, even prior to our first interview. After our weekly recreational meetings at university, she would enthusiastically bring up the topic of multiple relocations, and she would disclose personal information in these brief moments. It appeared to me that Claudia had a lot of experience that she wanted to share, and her excitement over her stories was contagious.

Tea cup in hand, video and audio recording equipment across from her on the coffee table, Claudia read and signed the informed consent forms and told me stories of days gone by. During our first interview, we sat on the couch in my informal living room, as the sun warmed the area and the cats strolled by from time to time. We made ourselves comfortable by facing each other and we leaned against the large cushions in the back of the couch. I felt very comfortable in Claudia's presence, and her constant smile appeared to set the tone for the interview.

Throughout that first interview, Claudia highlighted exciting things about her childhood. She picked up mostly on the funny and nice memories of meeting new friends, living in new houses, and exploring new outdoor landscapes. Even when her memories were traumatic, Claudia revealed an inner strength. When she spoke of her family, her love and dedication to them was transparent. I admired and respected Claudia's involvement with her family, and I often found myself gently smiling in acceptance. The interview was lengthy and engaging. In fact, her story was like reading an interesting adventure and I felt myself wanting to hear more and more.

I enjoyed Claudia's company and the stories we uncovered during the time we spent together. Later that day, after our first interview, I found myself wanting to visit the places where she had been to, and wondered how Claudia managed to get through all the life changes she faced during her adolescence. Several months later, when we were able to finally meet for our second

interview, we focused on the challenges she faced during adolescence and reflected on the meanings of her experiences. Our second interview was just as absorbing as the first one, and I continued to be amazed by her connection with her family and her ability to make the best of what comes her way.

### *Case Interpretation*

Throughout her schooling years, Claudia lived in two provinces in a total of six different cities. She attended eight different schools and had to move homes eleven times between kindergarten and the time she entered university. Although she changed schools often during her elementary school years, she was able to complete her junior high school program in one single school. In a different school, she completed the remaining three years of her secondary education. However, mobility continued to be the norm in her life, even though she remained in the city of Edmonton for her last seven educational years prior to university.

Claudia's story of geographical mobility is closely linked to the life events that took place within her family, especially the events surrounding her mother's story as seen through Claudia's eyes. Listening to Claudia's stories, I followed her family transitions as her mother married for the first time, her siblings were born, her mother divorced and reached out to a different environment in Nova Scotia, her mother developed another romantic relationship, and her mother responded to various stresses in her life. In Claudia's life, there was always an important member of the family worth talking about. There were the stepfathers and their involvement in the family, her aunt and the new cousins, the new uncles, grandparents, and the connections she developed with each of them. During her adolescent years, when Claudia was no longer relocating between cities, her story of relationships continued within the context of her moves between homes and changes of schools. Her story of mobility during those years in Edmonton served as a background

to the more important events taking place in her life and in the lives of the people she cared about.

Contrary to Stokols and Shumaker's suggestion (1982), the lack of choice to relocate was not a relevant element in Claudia's story. According to the Chick and Meleis' model of adaptation (1986), the level of disruption in her life, the number of transitions she experienced, the permanency of each move, and the unpredictability and lack of control over each change, these elements could have been enough to create a narrative of discontentment, anger, and frustration for Claudia. Rather, the process of exiting and entering new communities from Alberta to Nova Scotia and within Nova Scotia was experienced as smooth transitions for Claudia. Her story of those days is clearly marked by the absence of difficulties directly or indirectly related to her nomadic lifestyle.

There is a general agreement in the literature that geographical mobility is a stressful event (Finkel, 2001; Humke & Shaefer, 1995; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982), and Claudia acknowledged many of the disruptions in her life when she left Red Deer, such as leaving her friends and her grandfather behind. As Puskar and Ladeley (1992) observed in their study of adolescents, Claudia felt excited about her first move to Nova Scotia, when she was finishing grade one. As she explained, her excitement was due to her previous positive experience visiting her relatives in that province. Unlike many reports in the literature, Claudia never expressed feelings of painful loss or grief (Aisenstein, 1988; Allan & Bardsley, 1983; Matter & Matter, 1988; Toffler, 1970), anger or fear (Allan and Anderson, 1986), or isolation and identity loss (Litwack & Foster, 1981; Stein, 1984) surrounding her multiple moves.

Within that same year, after her arrival in Nova Scotia, Claudia moved back and forth between homes and cities within the province, and finally had a chance to settle in Lilly Lake prior to the end of grade two. It was at that time, when she was beginning to feel comfortable in

that community, that Claudia's family started to prepare for another move. This time, as she moved to Wolfville, Claudia did feel the loss of friendships and the frustration of having to start things all over again in a new community. However, her excitement about the new environment, new friendships, and continued connection with family members took central role in her stories throughout her moves in Nova Scotia.

As she entered each community, there was always something interesting about the area she lived in that she was excited to talk about, such as the haunted house, the piles of paper stacked near her building, a bedroom, the ocean, or a simple ditch. No matter where Claudia moved to, there was always something that she liked about the new environment, be it in the immediate surrounding or the neighbourhood where she lived. Her ability to give herself to each new situation, to embrace and explore the new surrounding and the new circumstances was evident in her narrative, as she quickly moved from one exciting story to another. Toffler (1970) suspected that geographical mobility leads to lack of commitment to the new environment, but no matter how many moves she had experienced, Claudia immersed herself in each new home, each new landscape, and each new social opportunity.

Claudia's positive early experiences moving within Nova Scotia can be partially understood by examining two elements in her story: "Person-environment fit" and "exploratory tendencies". Theoretical models of adaptation to life transitions, such as geographical mobility, suggest that these two elements may have a positive role in the experience of relocation (Carlisle-Frank, 1992; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982). Claudia may have been predisposed to direct her attention to her physical surroundings and to explore the physical environment, as she highlighted her story with detailed descriptions of each new home, her bedrooms, and the environment surrounding each location she lived in. In addition, as Pollock and Reken (2003) noted in their research literature, her willingness and ability to take advantage of present opportunities may

have been enhanced by the multiple needs to adjust to new locations. In addition, the various places where she lived allowed Claudia to maintain her active lifestyle, to remain outdoors as much as possible, to climb trees, and to play in the snow. With every move in Nova Scotia, Claudia enjoyed a high level of person-environment fit. As Claudia indicated, she enjoyed her many homes in Nova Scotia.

A stable and consistent environment is important for children's well-being (Buerkle, 1997), and Claudia was able to find stability in the constant presence of her family, in the traditions they carried, and in the familiarity of the things she always displayed around each and every room she had. As Carlisle-Frank's (1992) theoretical model of adaptation explains, "multiple personal, social, and environmental factors are assumed to interact as facilitative or deleterious determinants of relocation adjustment" (p.836). In Claudia's story, the social environment was experienced as very supportive and warm. She reported to have the ability to make friends quite easily, her family circle continued to increase throughout her elementary school years, and academic success was the norm for her.

Although Jennings (1967) indicated that mobility may promote family dependence (Richards, Donahue, & Gullota, 1985), Claudia's attachment to her mother and later to her siblings were a function of her earlier experiences. As Claudia observed, it was just herself and her mother during the first four years of her life; therefore she felt it was natural for her to worry about her mother, and later about her siblings. Claudia's love for her family, and appreciation for her extended family kept her close to them throughout all her moves. Having so many family members nearby meant that Claudia always had a constant and secure social support network. Even when Claudia had not had the chance to develop friends in the new community, she had her father, her mother, her siblings, and the relatives she met along the way. Positive relationship with parents was observed to enhance a child's ability to cope with a move and to make friends

(Goldberg, 1980; Gordon & Gordon, 1958), and it was also related to adolescent personal adjustment (Pittman & Bowen, 1994). In addition, Stubblefield (1955) observed that family relationships were the most stabilizing factor for the mobile child.

As Holland-Jacobsen, Holland, and Cook (1984) suggested, children's adaptation to a new school requires that a child meets academic and behavioural standards of a new school, that a child is accepted by the students in his or her assigned classroom, and that he or she finds an acceptable friendship circle. Claudia was successful at meeting all these tasks. In addition, children who tend to experience difficulty following relocation do not exhibit Claudia's academic aptitude or social skills (Cornille, Bayer, & Smith, 1983). Some studies have also recognised the importance of providing information for recently relocated children (Strother & Harvill, 1986; Wilson, 1993). To this day, it is still important for Claudia to know her way around her environment and she spends a lot of time learning about bus schedules and routes. It was no different during her elementary school years in Nova Scotia. She always feared missing the bus and not having an alternate way of getting to school. In Edmonton, she was relieved when she found out she could just walk to school, and she learned that route as soon as possible.

Although some children report having difficulty relinquishing old friendships and forming new ones (Brett, 1982), during her years in Nova Scotia, it was easy for Claudia to leave old friends and reconnect with others during her elementary school years. As her story suggests, it was harder to leave her friends from Minasville because she had spent so many years with them, from the end of grade three until the end of grade five. As suggested in Finkel's review (2001), (Lagrone, 1978; Long, 1986), it may be that Claudia's earlier friendships, prior to moving to Minasville, were not as strong as the ones she was able to develop in that ocean side community. However, Claudia's story only focused on the fact that she did have friends, and that she was able to play with them and have fun. It is also possible that the fact that she did not stay long enough

in those communities prior to Minasville might have helped her relinquish those connections more easily, and to rely on her family ties which were more enduring. In addition, Claudia recognized that the physical distance between them, her dislike of using the phone, communication limitations during those days, and the fact that they no longer had anything to talk about as they were going to different schools, made it easier for her to let go of these friends.

Thus far, the following factors have been introduced to Claudia's narrative as one way of understanding her positive experience in Nova Scotia: Claudia's prior positive experience in Nova Scotia, her willingness to explore new environments, the fit between each new location and Claudia's preferences, the stability she found in the presence of her family and in her bedroom, the constancy of the traditions they carried, her ability to make friends easily, her ability to let go of these friendships, the welcoming and friendly culture of the people in Nova Scotia, Claudia's academic ability, and Claudia's connection with her family.

As counsellors and psychologists participating in a research study noted, recently relocated children may also need support in dealing with challenges that many modern families face (Cornille, Bayer, & Smith, 1983). Claudia's difficulties during those days were closely associated with family changes as her mother dealt with divorce issues, as Claudia experienced her mother's stress, as Claudia had to travel back and forth between provinces to visit her first step-father, and as Claudia took more responsibilities around the house, having to look after her siblings and do housekeeping chores. Apart from these challenges, Claudia lived a happy life in Nova Scotia.

The experience of the self is considered as a major element marking the transition process (Chick & Meleis, 1986), and an increased feeling of self worth has been linked to positive adaptation following relocation (Carlisle-Frank, 1992). During her transition from Minasville to Edmonton, two events were of particular significance for Claudia: the celebration her friends

prepared in Minasville prior to her departure, and the card she received a year later from these same friends. For Claudia, these events strengthened her feelings of being loved, accepted, and connected with others.

As she moved back to Alberta, in the summer prior to her last year in elementary school, Claudia's story took a different turn. In her narrative, Claudia once again talked about the environment and its importance in her life, but this time her story lacked the excitement of earlier years. The move to Edmonton was a dramatic transition in terms of environmental change. Claudia, the tomboyish girl, was now in a big city, away from the large expanses of nature and living in a home considerably below the standard she was used to enjoying. Entertainment options were no longer just outside her door as was the case when she lived in the country in Nova Scotia. Small apartments and lack of privacy had replaced large homes with private bedrooms, and a concrete jungle replaced nature. As Carlisle-Frank (1992) and Stokols and Shumaker (1982) suggested, this low person-environment fit represented a challenge for Claudia.

As Carlisle-Frank (1992) postulated, access to services and facilities, as well as economic climate can also affect adaptation to transition. Claudia explored the opportunities in the city only to find out she needed money to enjoy the facilities near her home, money that the family did not have. Being unable to entertain herself outdoors, and without money to access the new entertainment options, Claudia was confronted with a new perception of the family's financial situation.

As Claudia narrated her experiences upon her arrival in Edmonton, she indicated that mobility issues were compounded by the many difficulties challenging the family at that time, as has been suggested in the literature (Cornille, Bayer, & Smith, 1983). Claudia spoke of the difficulties she faced trying to look after her siblings who were challenging her authority in those days. In addition she had to complete homework while her siblings argued with one another



nearby, and she still felt the need to organize things around the house because her mother was working late in those days.

Despite these difficulties, Claudia was able to find her own place within her small new home, and she eventually found a place within her school community. Even though pre-relocation attachment has been hypothesized to interfere with adjustment (Carlisle-Frank, 1992; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982), Claudia was able to once again adapt to her new life, despite the challenges. As she had done so many times before, she adapted well to her new school, made friends, and succeeded academically, despite the fact that her responsibilities at home continued to be taxing. As suggested in the literature, Claudia's prior adjustment was reflected in her post-adjustment stories (Blane, Pilling, & Fogelman, 1985; Shinn, 2000; Stroh & Brett, 1990a,b; Temple & Reynolds, 1999).

In her final year of elementary school, shortly after arriving in Edmonton, Claudia spoke of the role of the children's curiosity about her life in Nova Scotia, of her ability to become involved with others, and the role of her previous education in Nova Scotia. As she answered and asked questions to her classmates, soon she befriended everyone. As the academic education she received in Nova Scotia was ahead of that in Edmonton, teachers were very complimentary of Claudia's success, as she surpassed the local grade level expectation. Claudia once again felt accepted by all.

As she joined the new school in Edmonton, Claudia noticed that her classmates formed small groups of friendships and did not get involved with certain other friends. Claudia, however, was able to use her prior experience from Minasville and get along with everyone. She continued to use her friendship experience from Minasville as a model for interpersonal relationships, trying to be accepting and friendly to everyone. Later, in junior and high school, when Claudia experienced isolation due to friendship dynamics, she became even more aware of the cultural

differences she was facing. As she tried to accept everyone, as had been the norm in Minasville, she had to face the reality that many students were not accepting of her, which was a blow to Claudia's self-concept. She had always felt like an accepted member of every group she joined, but in junior and high school she had to learn to cope for the first time with friendship difficulties.

Between friendship issues and all the other challenges that Claudia and her family had to endure, mobility stories became less important in her narrative. Her further moves within the city represented an added stress in her life and became an indicator of financial instability. Claudia accepted the moves, but experienced much frustration at her parents' inability to make ends meet.

Claudia's story in itself tells us about the process of relocation in her life, how she experienced it, how she connected events, and about the beliefs she acquired as she lived her nomadic life. I have linked both her experience and various elements from her story to what has been shared with us in the literature on the topic of geographical mobility. What remains to be discussed are the meanings she derived from her experiences.

Claudia explicitly indicated that she recognizes the value of always having had her family with her, and the value of having organized her bedroom always in the same way, with the things she collected displayed neatly around her room. As she moved from place to place, her family and her bedroom represented the constant pieces in her life in the midst of all those moves. The stability of the environment, as suggested in the literature (Buerkle, 1997), was important for her. Despite the moves, she was able to find constancy in her immediate surrounding.

Looking back in her life, as part of this study, she recognized the impact her earlier experiences had in feeding her love for certain traditions, such as birthday cakes, playing in the snow during winter, and Christmas trees. Even though she moved frequently, those traditions remained strong in her family and added to the feeling of constancy.

Despite the constancy she obtained from family, traditions, and her bedroom, the many moves were a source of worry for Claudia, both because they represented added stress in her life, and because they were an indication of financial instability during the years she lived in Edmonton. Although Claudia adapted well to each and every move, the accumulated stress over the years finally caught up with her. Claudia interpreted the many moves as a source of stress. Consequently these experiences shaped Claudia's current academic, career, and lifestyle choices, leading her to seek stability and low levels of stress wherever possible.

As Claudia moved, she learned of the difficulties in keeping in touch with friends from a distance. She understood that children's friendships are largely centred on their schooling experiences, and as they stop going to the same school their friendships weaken. Moving destroys that link that ties elementary school friends together. In addition, Claudia learned the value of accepting everyone as others had accepted her, and she learned of the value of the support of her extended family.

Having lived in so many places, Claudia realizes that her home is everywhere. As Claudia observed the lives of others who live near her and compares it to her own, she confessed that the great loss of having lived as a gypsy has been the absence of a childhood friend in her life.

To understand Claudia's current desire for stability is to understand her story of support and understanding as she accepted the many moves, helped her family through their many challenges, and worked her problems out on her own. To understand her success, is to understand her ability to accept new people and places, her intellectual enthusiasm, and her friendly and accepting nature.

### *Danielle's Narrative*

#### *Interview Process*

When Danielle first contacted me via electronic mail expressing interest in participating in the study, I was thrilled to have succeeded in reaching a potential participant through the university advertisement. As she indicated, someone from the mailing list knew of her experiences and forwarded the ad to Danielle, thinking that she might be interested in the opportunity.

Danielle's first message was short and succinct. It stood in stark contrast to my personal written communication style, which is usually very long and filled with greetings and cordiality. I was surprised by her direct approach to communication and I had to reconsider my biases surrounding communication style. I was, however, very grateful to her kind offer to give her time and share her knowledge to assist with this study. In fact, it appeared from her short message that she had expertise in the subject of this study, expertise that she was willing to share.

Danielle's following messages were warmer, but just as concise as the other ones. I began to warm up to her as I accepted our differences. She demonstrated a strong willingness to help me with this study, and she was always very prompt at replying to my messages. From our correspondence, I had the feeling that Danielle was a very confident and assertive woman. I could hardly wait to meet her in person.

In the morning of our first meeting, I was understandably excited, as Danielle was the first participant to contribute her stories to this research. As I prepared the equipment that morning, the phone rang in the background. It was Danielle who needed directions to my place. She was calling from a gas station nearby, so I knew it wouldn't be long before she knocked on my door. Despite our previous contact, that was our first time hearing each other's voices, and I remember thinking how young and pleasant she sounded. Considering my initial feelings derived from Danielle's written communication, I was surprised by the softness of her voice, and then

surprised again to open my front door and find myself facing a radiant, well dressed woman who offered an accepting smile despite the winter outdoors.

Slim and elegant, Danielle looked much younger than her age, and more fragile than the assuredness in her voice. Her love for art was immediately noticeable as she commented on one of my favourite artworks on the wall of our interview room. Her identification as an artist would become apparent throughout our interviews, as would her vision of how children should be raised and treated. I shared her love for art, and appreciated her empathy towards children.

As I engaged in small talk with Danielle and offered her a drink, she politely refused and requested to start the interview right away. With paper in hand containing her notes about her moves and answers to some of the guiding questions I had shared with her previously, Danielle started at the beginning. She methodically followed her years from early childhood to current days, acknowledging not remembering much about certain periods. She focused her story mostly on school experiences because she thought that was the important part I wanted to hear about. As I inquired about other areas in her life, she admitted not having much to say. She smiled from time to time, but the overall feel of her stories was a sad one. As I listened to her story during that first interview, I empathised with the little girl she had once been, and admired the confidence she had achieved.

My relationship with Danielle could be characterized as a professional partnership. There was a mutual respect in our relationship, each of us acknowledging what the other was bringing into the study: Danielle with her personal experiences, and I with my research background. Although Danielle was willing to explore different aspects of her story, she was also aware of how much she wanted to share, switching topics whenever necessary. Despite her admitted self-protectiveness, she was eager to share her experiences; in turn, I embraced her stories and respected her need to establish a less personal relationship.

Danielle must have spent hours reviewing the transcript. Her dedication to the study was admirable. Although she found the transcript difficult to read, as I had included all interjections in it, she took time to review it and to reword large portions of the interview, doing a tremendous job summarizing her experiences. During this first transcript revision, Danielle chose to remove her disclosure beyond her high school years, deeming them unnecessary to the study. She later agreed to reintroduce into her story aspects of her adult life that related to her geographical mobility experiences.

Several months later, when it was time for our second meeting, Danielle opted to meet at a neutral location. She arrived at the quiet library with a candid smile, and we informally talked briefly about her travels. Once again, Danielle requested that we initiate our meeting right away. Throughout the interview she was clear about how much she wanted to discuss and she was quick to ask for the next question as soon as she felt we had discussed a topic long enough. I was concerned that Danielle was not enjoying her participation in the study. I found myself talking excessively trying to make her feel comfortable, but Danielle kept us on track, and we finished the interview within the expected time frame.

Despite my concerns, Danielle continued to participate in this study, providing feedback whenever asked, and always putting the effort into her revisions. After the second interview, I contacted Danielle once again with further questions so that I could obtain more details about her childhood. She admitted that it was emotionally difficult for her to revisit her past, but she answered all questions in a timely fashion. Her dedication to the study continued to impress me.

### *Case Interpretation*

Growing up in two countries, in four different cities, and having attended eight different schools, Danielle had a story to tell, one that began with a quiet and often scared girl, and ended with a confident and private woman who is proud of her accomplishments. She delivered a story

centred on schooling and marked by lack of friendships, difficulty in establishing ties and fitting in, incidents of embarrassment and punishment, uninvolved parents, and lack of supportive teachers. Positive experiences were limited to her trip on a boat on the way to Germany, spending her allowance on roasted nuts, and the somewhat better years when she lived in Ontario.

As a young girl, it seemed that Danielle was just floating through waves, waiting for a chance to catch a good ride in the crest of a high wave so she could land her feet on the shore and walk on her own. The waves were gentle enough to allow her some breathing room to enjoy some of the ride, but rough enough to make her gasp for air and leave some rough marks from scraping her knees on the harsh sand. No lessons were given to her on how to survive in the ocean, no floating devices, no guide beside her. She went through the motions until she was forced by circumstances to find her own way out to the shore and walk her own path. It was a story of growth, discovery, and liberation.

For Danielle, the moves between schools were just as filled with anxiety as the moves between cities. No matter where she went, Danielle experienced a lot of fear, anxiety, and insecurity. There was the fear of not knowing her way back home from her new school, when she was in grade one. There was the fear, anxiety, and insecurity that she felt in the motel room prior to leaving for Germany, when she observed her mother's experience of insecurity. And there were the multiple fears of not fitting in, the anxiety of going to a new school with new rules, the anxiety about being with children who had already formed their cliques and understood the local rules, the fear of being shamed by teachers and students as she tried to immerse herself in the new environment.

Fear and anxiety prior to moving is a common theme in children's books (e.g., *Henry and Mudge and Annies Good Move*, by Cynthia Rylant; *I'm Not Moving, Mama*, by Nancy Carlstrom; *Friendship: From your old friends to your new friends*, by Nuria Roca). Children's apprehension

about an impending move or fear of joining a new school have also been identified in the literature as possible reactions to moving (Allan & Anderson, 1986; Matter & Matter, 1988; Splete & Rasmussen, 1977). For Danielle, this was an experience that repeated itself each time she was required to move.

It has been suggested that both infants (Aisenstein, 1988) and children (Buerkle, 1997) may react to relocation in the same manner as their primary caregiver. During her trip to Germany, Danielle felt the anxiety and insecurity her mother was going through, and reacted accordingly. Anxiety about future relocations may also have been exacerbated by each previous negative experience in school settings.

Danielle's anxiety and fears were followed by experiences of isolation as she entered each new school. As she commented, in Germany she was able to bond with children in the summer prior to entering grade three, but once she came back to Canada she always felt ostracized, isolated, and disconnected from the other children. She remembered one friend from grade six and a couple of friends from Ontario, but no more than that. Although Litwack and Foster (1981) and Stein (1984) spoke about the experience of isolation as being closely linked to identity loss among migrating populations, Danielle's experience, as is explained in her story, was more akin to lack of belonging and loneliness, as investigated by Puskar and Ladeley (1992).

Although the experiences of anxiety and isolation were repeated throughout her moves, the experience of loss was only linked to her move from Germany back to Canada. It may be that her fears and anxiety from earlier moves had been more important to her than the loss of friendships when she moved to a different school in grade one and when she left for Germany before the end of grade two. As she commented, those changes were sudden, and therefore the immediate situation took precedence over what was left behind. During those two transitions, Danielle had to learn how to get back home from school in grade one and she had to deal with the



tension and anxiety she observed in her family as she waited for the unknown prior to arriving in Germany. When she left Germany, however, the feeling of loss of friendships was fully experienced as she had time to realize the magnitude of the changes in her life during the boat trip back to Canada.

Mobility has been closely linked to the experience of loss (Aisenstein, 1988; Allan & Bardsley, 1983; Toffler, 1970), and this loss can be experienced as sadness, anger, and possible aloof detachment (Allan & Bardsely, 1983), or hurt about leaving friends (Allan & Anderson, 1986). Although Danielle did not express it as such, her narrative was imbued with suggestions of anger at being treated like a thing that could be picked up from one place and dropped in another without regard for her well-being, and at not having choice in her life. There is resentment and pain at the realization that she had to go through these experiences as a child. However, for Danielle, her experiences of powerlessness were not only related to mobility, but they were also intimately connected to life in the military, to her father's authoritarian parenting, and to the child treatment practices in those days.

Belief in one's inability to control the environment has been suggested to negatively affect adaptation following relocation (Carlisle-Frank, 1992). Although Danielle was able to express her rebelliousness from time to time, she was expected to be quiet and to do as she was told, both at home and at school. She felt that this lack of control was especially present in her household, because they were forced to follow the rules of both the military and of her father. When she was told to pack up her things and prepare for another move, that's what Danielle had to do. She had no choice. Stokols and Shumaker (1982) have suggested that lack of choice to relocate present an adaptation challenge for the recently relocated individual, and neither Danielle nor her father had a choice whether to relocate or to stay.

As Danielle accepted geographical mobility as an irremovable aspect of military life, and as the loss she experienced during her transition back to Canada was so great, Danielle developed a coping mechanism to help her in future relocations. She understood that with military life came short-lived relationships, and therefore she understood the need to limit the strength of her friendships to limit the pain of future separations. This lack of commitment to one's social and environmental setting has been recognized as a potential consequence of a nomadic lifestyle (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Pinder, 1989; Toffler, 1970). Danielle's story is another example of this lack of commitment, both in relation to others, as it occurred during the years she lived in central Canada, and in relation to her environment.

In each of the four places she lived, Danielle was never able to participate in any activities outside her school, both because of her family's tight financial situation and because there was no encouragement from her parents to do so. Exploratory tendencies are hypothesized to facilitate adaptation to new environments (Carlisle-Frank, 1992; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982), and despite Danielle's expressed interest in travel and different cultures, as when she enjoyed observing the gypsies in Germany, her story did not reveal stories of her involvement with what was around her beyond the school setting. When asked about her experiences outside the school, Danielle simply remarked that she played in playgrounds and on her street with other kids from the neighbourhood or her younger sister. Her narrative was about her adaptation to each of the eight schools she attended.

Danielle linked her isolation partially to her lack of commitment, but also to her poor social skills and to contextual factors, such as disliking her classmates and arriving in school half way through the school year. Danielle did not want to associate with the children from her neighbourhood when she lived in the prairies; she observed that she had an inappropriate sense of humour that interfered with her ability to make friends; and arriving mid-way through the school

year meant that groups were already formed upon her arrival. This low congruence with others in her environment, “person-environment fit”, as well as poor social skills and contextual factors have been linked to adjustment difficulties (Carlisle-Frank, 1992).

This experience of isolation is reflected in the literature on counselling, which points to children’s need to find an acceptable place among his or her new peers, and being accepted as an appropriate member of the assigned class (Holland-Jacobsen, Holland, & Cook, 1984), as well as the need to establish a social network in school and in the neighbourhood (Cornille, Bayer, & Smith, 1983). However, for Danielle, the timing of her transition experiences, which occurred mostly part way through the school year, hindered this process. For Danielle, it was much easier to adjust to school transitions that occurred at normative times or at the beginning of the school year.

School life was complicated by her academic difficulties and the accompanying embarrassment in front of her classmates and teachers, who were not understanding of her peculiar situation. She felt exposed each time she was laughed at because of questions she asked in class, and each time that her low marks were shown on the blackboard along with everyone else’s in order of achievement. As she explained, each curriculum was different from the other and it was difficult to know what the teacher had already covered through the several months in the school year prior to her arrival. Danielle’s difficulty with differing educational systems is shared by others (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990; Pinder, 1989).

In addition, Danielle considered the possibility that her academic struggles were due to pre-existing academic difficulties rather than the high mobility rate she experienced. This suggestion finds support in the literature, which reports that low achievement following relocation is closely related to prior achievement level (Blane, Pilling, & Fogelman, 1985; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). However, even without parental

encouragement or support, Danielle went on to successfully complete high school and post secondary education, including a university degree. Danielle feels that the high rate of mobility was a definite detriment to her academic achievement throughout her school years.

Danielle's story is filled with elements thought to hinder a student's ability to adjust well following relocation. According to counsellors and psychologists who work with school age children, students who have poor self-concept, are older or younger than their classmates, have poor social skills, and require special academic attention are more prone to experiencing adjustment problems (Cornille, Bayer, & Smyth, 1983). Danielle reported a long lasting struggle with low self-esteem and academic difficulties, she recognized how her inappropriate sense of humour and bravado interfered with her ability to make friends, and when she was in Ontario she was placed in a classroom with students who were older than she was. In addition, Danielle did not enjoy a positive and supportive relationship with her parents, she was distant from her siblings, and there were no other family members in her life. The availability of family support has been investigated in the literature, with quality of relationship with parents emerging as the factor making the largest unique contribution to adolescent personal adjustment (Pittman & Bowen, 1994), family relationships being the most stabilizing factor for the mobile child (Stubblefield, 1955), and positive relationship with parents being associated with increased ability to cope with a move and to make friends (Goldberg, 1980; Gordon & Gordon, 1958).

For Danielle, changes of schools or cities were filled with fear and anxiety. After her painful departure from Germany, she preserved herself from feelings of loss by not becoming close to anyone. Danielle was able to continue moving without having to experience loss and pain at each uprooting. This lack of commitment, compounded by her low self-esteem and poor social skills, led to difficulties making friends. Contextual factors, such as the timing of her move and the low congruence with her classmates, increased her isolation and loneliness.

Carlisle-Frank (1992) suggested that availability of support facilitates the relocation process, and the creation of support groups within school has been used as a tool for helping the mobile child (Stroher & Harvill, 1986; Wilson, 1993). In spite of Danielle's warm relationship with her mother, there was no support available for her, not within the family, not in her community, not in the military, and not in her school. Danielle's story is marked by the absence of important others in her life. As she compared childrearing and educational practices during her days with current practices, she was dismayed to observe that during her entire schooling years she encountered only one teacher who treated her with respect.

The only elements Danielle identified as helpful in her adaptation process were being transferred at the beginning of the school year, and having other military children in the same school. In Germany, for example, she arrived at the end of grade two, which was difficult due to the presence of pre-formed social groups in each classroom, but as she met children during the summer months and as they returned to school in the fall, it was easier for her to bring those summer friendships into the school environment. In addition, in Germany, all kids were from military families, so they all had been someplace different one point or another; she was not the only newcomer, the only new kid who didn't know the rules or who didn't know where to go or what questions to ask. Her entry in a new school in grade seven as well as her entry into grade ten were easier to manage because she felt all children were newcomers, and therefore they were all in the same situation trying to make friends together.

Growing up with frequent geographical and school mobility was a challenge for Danielle. As she narrated her story, she observed many changes in her approach to life attributed to her earlier experiences with change. Many of the meanings she drew from her stories relate to forming friendships. For Danielle, mobility was inevitable. It was part of military life. It was all around her, as she left others behind, and as she saw others leaving. The meaning of multiple

geographical mobility for Danielle was translated into the feeling of loss and the need to protect herself from getting hurt by limiting the level of connection with others.

Danielle understands that throughout her life she has chosen not to develop deep relationships with others outside her family circle to protect herself from eventual pain of loss, as she continued to move as a child and later as an adult. This absence of close connections has been a great loss in Danielle's life. In addition, for Danielle, empathizing with one's emotions is a necessary component to maintaining close relationships. For her, distance prevents one from seeing emotions directly, and therefore she accepts that she cannot maintain long distance friendships.

As Danielle experienced the effects of multiple school changes in her life, she recognized the value of stability in children's lives. As such, her parenting practices were informed by her experiences growing up. Despite the fact that she continued to move while her children were attending school, she scheduled those moves to fit natural transitions for her children, either at the end of elementary school or at the end of junior high, always trying to stay in a place long enough for her children to build strong relationships. For Danielle, it is easier to join a new school at the beginning of the school year, when relationship groups are not yet fully formed. It is especially favourable if all students are newcomers, such as in the first year of a junior high school or the first year in a high school, when students don't have many friends from previous years.

Saddened by the treatment she and others received from teachers during childhood and adolescence, Danielle empathizes with children's needs. The changes that have occurred in parenting and educational practices since her own childhood are dramatically visible to Danielle. She thinks back about her own experiences with lack of support and realizes how helpful teachers and counsellors can be today in helping children adapt to their school lives. She has been able to

examine other sources of support, and hopes that the Military has undergone similar improvements in supporting the families and the children within the families that serve our country.

It was important to Danielle to address some positive contributions she obtained from her experiences with multiple geographical relocations. Danielle's experiences of moving have fostered a love for travel, an interest in different cultures, and an inclination to taste different foods. These have been, for Danielle, a positive long lasting consequence of living her life as a contemporary nomad.

### *Leona's Narrative*

#### *Interview Process*

Leona learned of my interest in studying multiple relocations several months prior to my contacting possible participants, when the study was still in its initial stages. A mutual friend of ours, who knew of my research interest, introduced us via electronic mail so that I could ask Leona about her interest in participating in the study.

From the start, Leona expressed strong support for my research. Not only did she support me as a student, but also my interest in the topic of relocation, because she believed it deserved its due attention in the literature. I felt a genuine empathy from her, as she seemed to understand the challenges and rewards of completing a thesis, and she was very accommodating of my schedule. I felt a special connection to Leona because we both admired our mutual friend tremendously, and she was as empathic and loving as our mutual friend. I felt a sense of familiarity with Leona, even prior to meeting her in person.

Despite her hectic work schedule, Leona welcomed me in her house on one of her days of rest for our first meeting. Dressed in casual clothes and a warm smile, she helped me set up my recording equipment as we exchanged words of kindness. I thanked Leona for all the support she

had provided through emails and her understanding of the delays in booking our first interview. Leona expressed her satisfaction in being able to assist me with the study and in seeing mobility issues being investigated by a researcher. Our second interview was similarly warm and empathic. Again, we met at her house, weeks before Christmas, a time that was particularly sensitive for Leona, because she was reminded of the many family celebrations that her parents did not join her at her aunt's house.

During both interviews, Leona approached her life story from a global perspective, focusing on general experiences and providing many current interpretations of her experiences growing up. She demonstrated a lot of patience with my recurring attempts to help her recall events surrounding each move, and she put a lot of effort in recalling details from her past. Despite the painful memories, Leona was willing to explore them during the interviews.

As I listened to her story growing up with a cleft palate, I remembered how I had hardly noticed it when I first met her in person. When we met for the second time, after I had read the transcripts of our first interview several times, I wondered, once again, how much her appearance had changed since childhood, because to me she appeared radiant, with warm eyes and shiny hair cascading over her shoulders. Although I could see the remaining traces of a cleft palate, it was unimportant to me. I was touched by Leona's story and her ability to forgive. I admired her intelligence and her self-confidence. I was inspired by her determination and perseverance.

### *Case Interpretation*

Between kindergarten and grade twelve, Leona changed schools thirteen times, two of which she attended twice in different years. She lived in four different provinces in ten different cities during those thirteen years. The two and a half years that Leona spent in Yellowknife represented the longest stretch she spent in one city between childhood and adolescence, but she attended two different schools within that time period. Although many of her school changes



occurred during the elementary school years, when she attended two or three schools during each grade, those were happy years for Leona. Her later school years, however, were filled with challenges and pain, but also growth and many realizations.

Leona's memory of her elementary school years is punctuated by the differences between how she remembers her past and the past she is often told about in the company of her beloved aunts. Leona recognizes that she must have been hurt by others during elementary school, but the memory she has is of a positive childhood. As she narrated her story, she tried to conciliate both versions of her life story, accepting that challenges must have occurred, but giving priority to the positive memories she has of her childhood.

During elementary school, up until the end of grade six, Leona's story of mobility was marked by initial difficulties due to the visible scars on her face. Her physical appearance remained a challenge to her adaptation process until she moved for the last time in grade eleven. It was a life-long struggle with acceptance, because others were unable to see beyond her physical appearance and used her scars to tease and torment her. As it has been reported, children who appear different from the norm (e.g., too big or too small for their age or who present a physical handicap) are more susceptible to experiencing adjustment difficulties (Cornille, Bayer, & Smyth, 1983). During elementary school, these challenges were short lived compared to the traumatic bullying and isolation she endured in junior and high school.

Stokols and Shumaker (1982) suggested that the experience of adaptation to a new environment changes across time. For Leona, during elementary school, what always started as rejection and isolation ended with acceptance and companionship. As Chick and Meleis (1986) suggested, life transitions involve changing experiences of the self until a new stable level is reached. For Leona, the transitions in elementary school were a process toward feeling accepted and appreciated for her attributes, other than just being judged by her physical looks.

Her story of her early school years is predominantly positive, exposing no negative experiences beyond the initial acceptance challenge she always faced and the fear of not finding her way home. As Leona learned her way around and developed friendships, she was able to experience the other positive things available in each community. Directional information and connection with others have been reported to be common needs of newcomers as they adjust to the new environment (Cornille, Bayer, & Smyth, 1983). Matter and Matter (1988) also acknowledged the importance of rules and procedures in the achievement of stability in children's lives.

As Leona explained in her story, the elementary school settings she experienced were very conducive to quick adjustment. The classrooms were small and teachers were able to help more closely with the formation of friendships. Students, despite the initial teasing, were easily capable of seeing and appreciating all of Leona's athletic and intellectual abilities, which helped her in games and playing time situations. In addition, Leona experienced no academic difficulties, meeting and exceeding all of her teacher's expectations, independent of which curriculum they followed. Children need to be accepted by their peers and by their assigned class, and they need to meet academic expectations upon entering a new school (Holland-Jacobsen, Holland & Cook, 1984). Leona was successful at all these tasks. Her adaptation process supports Carlisle-Frank's (1992) suggestion that personal qualities and supportive environments facilitate adaptation.

At school, Leona received support from her teachers in establishing social ties and fitting in. At home, however, Leona felt disconnected from her immediate family, even though she acknowledged having had good times with her brother and with her father. They followed no traditions that kept them close as a family unit. Especially during the time she lived in Yellowknife, she felt like they lived separate lives and she did not count on them as support. As

she had learned in her childhood, Leona kept her emotions to herself and maintained a certain distance from her parents. In addition, Leona saw them as the source of instability in her life as they, and more specifically her father, initiated each and every relocation in her life. For Leona, her father was the culprit of her repeated experiences of isolation. This perception increased her distance from her parents, an observation already made in the literature with regard to corporate employees and their corporations (Pinder, 1985). Furthermore, as explained in her story, Leona observed that her parents were not as available to be involved in her life as they should have been. This diminished parental availability during frequent relocation also finds echo in the literature (Aisenstein, 1988; Beem & Prah, 1984; Holland-Jacobsen, Holland, & Cook, 1984; Matter & Matter, 1988).

Leona appreciates the effort her mother put into creating normalcy for her and her brother as they moved from city to city. Although Buerkle (1977) observed that many families are unable to provide children with a stable and consistent environment conducive to children's well-being during relocation, Leona's mom was able to enrol her in extra-curricular activities wherever possible. As Carlisle-Frank (1992) hypothesized, these efforts were fruitful when the communities offered these opportunities and when Leona's parents were able to finance such activities. Leona also found solace in the constancy and safety of her many bedrooms and the company of her books, because these were always available to her wherever she went. However, Leona's most important source of stability was the presence, support, and predictability she obtained from her close relatives and their homes in Saskatchewan.

Exploration of emotions has been identified as a useful route to help newcomers adjust to a new environment (Matter & Matter, 1988; Strother & Harvill, 1986). Leona learned to keep her emotions to herself and to simply accept the initial rejections she suffered in every school as normal events in life. She was able to ignore her emotions, forgive others, and accept offers of

close relationships. Although her aunts insist that she developed inappropriate social skills as she dealt with these rejections in silence, Leona's story is characterized by eventual social adjustment. Even without exploring her emotions as a child or adolescent, Leona's story is filled with eventual adaptation. She either formed close ties or she accepted the isolation in her life as just steps toward something greater. Her experiences from early childhood, however, were told in a positive light, with a focus on the good memories she holds of the places she visited.

In the following transitions from elementary school through to her transition to Yellowknife, Leona's experiences alternated between well-being and isolation. As Leona arrived in the new town in northern Alberta, after a memorable year in the Okanagan, she experienced complete isolation, and left that town a year later without having established any social ties. In central Alberta, however, she experienced once again the feeling of being accepted and belonging, because she was able to integrate herself in school teams and friendship circles within school and in her neighbourhood. This need to develop a sense of belonging has been identified as an important issue for newcomers (Cornille, Bayer, & Smyth, 1983). When Leona moved to Yellowknife, she felt the loss of a good future in central Alberta. Her dreams of graduating with her friends were gone, and her hopes for continued social integration vanished away. The experience of loss was coupled with anger and pain. When she arrived in Yellowknife, she was faced once again with the familiar but exacerbated experience of rejection, isolation, and loneliness, with concomitant depression.

Other children and adolescents have reported similar negative feelings during their transition experiences (Aisenstein, 1988; Allan & Anderson, 1986; Allan & Bardsley, 1983; Litwack & Foster, 1981; Matter & Matter, 1988; Puskar & Ladeley, 1992; Stein, 1984; Toffler, 1970). However, the current literature has not provided measures of intensity or duration of these experiences, nor has bullying been examined in the literature of geographical mobility. Leona's

experiences led her to contemplate suicide, a response which has been associated with several elements present in Leona's story, namely, recency of move, distance of move, number of moves, and not keeping in touch with former friends (Potter et al., 2001).

Unlike other children who have been reported to have difficulty relinquishing old friendships after relocation (Brett, 1982), this was not an issue in Leona's narrative. The central issue for Leona was her experience of marginality and lack of belonging, which concurs with the experience of other mobile adolescents (Goldberg, 1980). However, Leona's difficulty establishing social ties was more intimately connected with her physical appearance than with the fact that she was the new student in the group.

Stokol and Shumaker (1982) suggested that person-environment fit is a valuable predictor of well-being following relocation, a suggestion that is also shared by Carlisle-Frank (1992). In their model of adaptation they suggested that individuals' well-being is highly improved by the congruence between their needs and the ability to meet those needs in a new environment. As one moves between two places, there is a comparison that needs to be made between those two environments in order to predict adjustment. According to their model, when one experiences the new environment as less congruent than the previous, there is less satisfaction. On a related comparison, when one has positive expectations for future experiences, the current environment is also negatively experienced.

Leona experienced a highly positive environment during her last elementary school year in the Okanagan. When she moved to northern Alberta, immediately after a rewarding experience spending summer with her relatives in Saskatchewan, Leona was devastated to find herself in that new community. The community, as she described it, was "*very dirty and grey*", "*oppressive*", and "*not fun*". There was a lack of support in her school, because teachers could not easily identify which students were in need of support. There was also the distance created between

students because they moved around to their respective classrooms, rather than staying in the same room all day long. As it had happened before, students in the school rejected Leona, but this time she felt she was the only target of their mockery. In spite of this low person-environment fit, Leona went through that year hanging on to her hope for the future; she looked forward to her future plastic surgery, which was to happen years later. There was no reason for Leona to feel attached to that community. The only positive thing was the availability of the boys and girls club, which she visited regularly because she felt safe in that location.

As she moved from this oppressive environment, Leona was influenced by her earlier experiences and feared the next transition. Children's literature recognizes fear as a common emotion in children as they prepare themselves for a move. Allan and Anderson (1986) have also identified a fear response to relocation in their study with young children. Leona feared the new school, she feared not having any friends, and she feared another school experience of isolation and loneliness.

The opposite experience took place when she moved from northern Alberta to central Alberta, because it turned out to be an exciting move for Leona. Despite her fears, she looked forward to that relocation. As other adolescents have reported (Leitzel, Charlton, & Jeffreys, 1997), Leona perceived the move as an opportunity to start over and redefine herself in a new social setting. The literature suggests that meanings ascribed to a move mediate the transition experience (Chick & Meleis, 1986; Richards, Donohue, & Gullota, 1985), and Leona's perception of this relocation provided a balance to the fears she experienced. Again, as Chick and Meleis (1986) proposed, the transition involved a change in Leona's experience of the self, moving from feeling ostracized and rejected to feeling like a valuable member of her school and community. Leona felt safe in the connection with her friends and in knowing her community.

Leona was able to meet her needs of social acceptance, belonging, and security in this town, experiencing once again a high degree of person-environment fit.

As Leona surrendered to the impositions of mobility in her life and felt dismayed at the need to start things all over again, her anger was transformed into energy to just deal with things until she could control her own life. Leona saw her moves as beyond her control and she needed to just accept them until the end of high school. This meaning she created along the way helped her cope with what lay ahead. As stated earlier, the connection between meanings and transition experience finds support in the literature (Chick & Meleis, 1986; Richards, Donohue, & Gullota, 1985).

The hope for a better life after high school fuelled Leona's spirit. It was with this attitude that Leona joined the grade-nine class in Yellowknife. Again, Leona experienced the dramatic change from a happy life, in a community where she was able to meet her needs of security and connectedness, to a new life without social integration and community attachment. In Yellowknife, Leona experienced a low level of person-environment fit.

As it occurred in elementary school, Leona experienced a period of transition before she finally found a way to survive in her new community and school in Yellowknife. This period, however, was much longer and much more painful than the short transitions of adaptation experienced in elementary school. Leona had always felt that joining a new school in the fall was easier than starting half way through the school year, when friendship groups had already been formed. In elementary school, even though she often joined schools mid-year, she was able to overcome the academic and social challenges students face when joining a new school. In northern Alberta and in Yellowknife, however, even though she joined the schools in these locations at the start of the school year, the low level of person-environment fit interfered with her transition process.

Leona made it clear in her narrative that she does not recommend that children be relocated after elementary school. Her observation is compatible with some of the studies investigating the mediating effect of age in children's adaptation to relocation, which have found more negative outcomes during adolescence compared to childhood (Barret & Noble, 1973), more alienation experiences in older adolescents compared to younger adolescents (Calabrese, 1989), and more reports of adjustment problems of teenagers compared to other human costs to corporate relocation (Pinder, 1989). Although some studies have not observed age differences in adaptation to relocation (Kroger, 1980a; Stroh & Brett, 1990b), Leona's experiences and interpretations lend support to the former suggestions.

In Yellowknife, Leona started school in the fall. However, as she indicated, all students had been going to that same school for years, so they all knew each other. Fitting in the new school was complicated by the cultural differences that Leona observed, as she indicated she was the only student in grade nine who had never drunk or experimented with drugs. The central element in Leona's story, however, was the students' inability to see beyond Leona's physical appearance and the consequent rejection and abuse she experienced during the transition period.

Adaptation to relocation encompasses other personal and social elements (Carlisle-Frank, 1992); therefore, it is important to highlight Leona's intellectual abilities, her personality, beliefs and hopes, and the support she received from her family in Saskatchewan as she coped with the challenges of relocation during her adolescent years. Leona did have a support system outside her community that helped her cope with the unmet needs of school adaptation, namely finding an acceptable place among her new peers and being accepted as an appropriate member of the assigned class (Holland-Jacobsen, Holland, & Cook; 1984). The support Leona found in her distant relatives was the pillar of her strength. It was through their support through letters and



phone calls that Leona was able to survive the loneliness and depression experienced in northern Alberta and Yellowknife.

The summers she spent in the company of her relatives provided her with the energy required to go through another difficult year; the knowledge that she would return to their company sustained her efforts until the following summer. In addition to the hope of an emotionally invigorating summer, Leona also harvested the hope of a successful plastic surgery, which would supposedly help her integration within the school community, and the hope for a better life outside of the school system. Leona was particularly emphatic about her belief that her negative experiences were just a step to something better that lay beyond high school. Both her parents and her extended family imbued Leona with thoughts of post-secondary education which, allied to her idealization of her cousin Brad's experiences at university, encouraged Leona to pull through the years.

Although Leona made no friends during her year in northern Alberta, she was eventually able to develop one friendship in Yellowknife. Leona's perception of her experiences changed as a result of this new connection. This friend presented Leona with the opportunity to meet others, to feel more accepted, and to experience connectedness as they shared experiences together. Even though the relationship was not carried through to high school, Leona was able to maintain superficial relationships with others in the school and, more importantly, others no longer bullied her. According to Leona, once other students were able to see beyond her physical appearance, they were able to enjoy her company, her sense of humour and wit.

In addition to her sense of humour and wit, Leona also had intellectual and athletic abilities that helped her meet some adjustment needs, such as meeting academic expectations, and achieving some success in social integration through her inclusion in sports teams in Yellowknife. In addition to this partial integration, Leona also obtained support from a teacher,

who provided Leona with the intellectual challenge she needed, and her evening job provided Leona with entertainment and purpose.

As Leona endured the teasing and abuse from various students, she became more of an introvert, and carried her life with hopes of trying to ignore the pain inflicted by her schoolmates. As Leona confronted the challenges of being accepted, she became more reserved and quiet, and was able to accept solitude in her life, an ability that has been observed in highly mobile groups (Kroger, 1980b). With the lack of connections, Leona felt distanced from her natural tendency to be part of a group and to be a leader.

Leona's story provides support to Stokol and Shumaker's (1982) hypothesis that length of residence does not necessarily promote greater attachment to place and enhanced well-being. Despite having lived in Yellowknife for two and a half years, Leona continued to look more fondly upon the years she spent in environments where she experienced higher levels of "person-environment fit". Furthermore, although she was able to carve out a comfortable life system in Yellowknife, in support of other reports in the literature, Leona experienced diminished quality of relationships (Lagrone, 1978; Long, 1986) and a sense of not being her true self (Litwack & Foster, 1981; Stein, 1984). With the absence of close friends, Leona was unable to express her leadership skills, her sense of humour, and opinions, and therefore she felt distanced from her true self.

With these factors in mind, Leona moved for the last time to Saskatchewan. As it had happened when she left northern Alberta, Leona was excited to move. Her excitement this time was related to the additional support she would obtain from being closer to her beloved relatives, and from the expectation that a bigger city would be able to offer more academic challenges as she felt she needed to remain interested in school work. Once again, hope remained an important

factor in Leona's adaptation process. She looked forward to completing high school and taking control of her own life.

Leona was able to find intellectual and artistic stimulation within and outside the school system. She found a group of students who shared similar interests, and in spite of their not becoming close friends, they were accepting of Leona and did not judge anyone. Furthermore, Leona was able to go through school unnoticed, because the school was very large and she could just fade into the background without suffering any verbal abuse like before. Again, in Saskatchewan, Leona proved capable of coping with the experience of solitude, as she commented she would go days without speaking to anyone. As Carlisle-Frank (1992) suggested, environmental factors, such as the availability of stimulation for Leona, along with the size of her school, were linked in Leona's story as factors that facilitated her experience in her last school year.

Although Leona experienced success in many areas, and she had people she could talk to, she remained lonely and isolated throughout most of her junior high and high school experiences. The unconditional love and support from her relatives, her hopes and the meanings she developed along the way increased Leona's ability to cope with the solitude she experienced. Her academic aptitude, her sense of humour and wit, and her athletic talents allowed Leona to experience academic success as she moved through thirteen different schools, integration with sports teams, and the eventual establishment of social ties. These social ties, although not enduring and although superficial, at least in the high school years, supported Leona's school adaptation. As Carlisle-Frank (1992) affirmed, "multiple personal, social, and environmental factors are assumed to interact as facilitative or deleterious determinants of relocation adjustment" (p.836).

Leona's story is punctuated by her visions of the educational system and of the students and teachers within that system. Through her experiences, she has come to believe that young

children, although inclined to tease others, are more accepting of differences, especially if talents useful to the group accompany these differences. In contrast, adolescents are unable to appreciate differences and seem unable to judge people by their own standards, because they have acquired socially accepted notions of what is a perfect human being.

As for teachers, the elementary school environment allows them to participate more effectively in the learning and adaptation of the students. In contrast, she believes it is difficult for teachers in junior high or high school to support the needs of their students. Leona questions teachers' motivations to be teachers in the later grades, and she wonders about their commitment to teaching and helping students grow. For Leona, school is seen as a restrictive environment that is filled with social norms that hinder personal growth. Due to these developmental notions and experiences with teachers in junior high and high school, Leona believes ardently that life for her only began after her graduation.

For Leona, mobility was a function of her father's search for an unidentified "something". Earlier in life, she simply moved and accepted each move. Later, she became aware of the constancy of the moves, and began to long for her chance to establish stability in her life. Mobility was equated with the expectation of a painful transition period, and the repeated relocations represented repeated experiences of rejection.

Despite the lingering self-consciousness about her appearance, which resulted from her repeated experiences with rejection and isolation, Leona accepts her past and tries to make meaning of it by linking it to the person she has become. She is pleased with the knowledge she has gained of the several provinces and cities she has visited, she appreciates the social skills she has mastered, and she values her ability to empathise with people's need for belonging. Trying to compensate for what was missing in her life during her childhood and adolescence, it became important for Leona to exercise control of her life, to be able to express herself as a leader, to

establish a stable and predictable environment, and to obtain a sense of belonging from the place she now calls home. The only loss for Leona has been the absence of a childhood friend; everything else was considered necessary to form the person she is glad to be.

## Chapter Six: Findings, Discussion, Research Quality, and Implications

### *Introduction*

Claudia, Danielle, and Leona shared their stories of growing up with multiple relocations, having lived in various places across Canada and beyond. Their lives were different on several fronts, including, but not limited to, the historical times they lived in, their personalities, the places they lived in, and their family contexts. The three of them are connected through their knowledge of their participation in this study, as they shared, at different times, and in different ways, their experiences of living as nomads.

This study was concerned with the process of multiple geographical relocations, specifically with the experience of entering and exiting multiple schools and communities, and the meanings the participants derived from their nomadic lifestyle. As a parent, at the beginning of this study, I embraced many questions related to multiple geographical relocations and hoped to find some guidance in my decision-making as I was faced with the option of bringing up my own two young children as nomads. As a counselling student, throughout the study, I listened to stories of needs, challenges, resources, and growth as I searched for the potential role of counsellors in the lives of children in nomadic families. As a researcher, I moved between my questions and wonderings, through the stories being constructed, the findings reported in the literature, and the opportunities for further studies.

In this final chapter, I propose several findings that support and extend the current literature on mobility, followed by an analysis of the quality of this research along with its limitations. I conclude this chapter with what I believe to be the major contributions of this study to families, helping professions, and researchers.

## *Findings and Discussion*

The stories presented in this thesis, along with their connection with current research findings, represent an additional step in understanding the process, experience, meaning, and impact of frequent geographical mobility during childhood and adolescence. In this section, I discuss the findings that pertain to the experiences and meanings related to the nomadic lifestyle and the process of multiple geographical relocations.

### *Experiences and Meanings of Multiple Geographical Relocations*

The three stories presented in this study demonstrate the diversity of experiences contemporary nomads cope with prior to a move and during the transition to the establishment of stability in a new environment. Many of these experiences have been previously observed in the literature on mobility, such as fear (Allan & Anderson, 1986); anxiety (Matter & Matter, 1988); anger (Allan & Anderson; Matter & Matter; Puskar, & Ladeley, 1992; Tofler, 1970); pain (Aisenstein, 1988; Allan & Anderson); sadness (Allan & Bardsley, 1983); isolation (Litwack & Foster, 1981; Stein, 1984); loneliness (Puskar & Ladeley); and, loss (Aisenstein; Allan & Bardsley; Toffler). Positive experiences included excitement about what was coming next, enjoyment and appreciation of the new possibilities, and hope for the future. While the excitement present in Claudia's and Leona's narratives has been observed in the literature (Pushkar & Ladeley), the role of hope in Leona's story adds a new focal point to understanding the experiences of adaptation to multiple relocations.

Supporting earlier statements in the literature (e.g., Finkel, 2001; Humke & Schaefer, 1995; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982), the three participants of this study experienced mobility as a stressful event. As useful as this descriptor is, it is limited in its ability to provide a detailed understanding of the experiences of growing up with multiple relocations. The multitude of experiences surrounding mobility cannot be subsumed by one single concept, and the large list of

experiences offered at the beginning of this section is not sufficient to account for the complex emotions that mobile students experience as they move from one place to another. Furthermore, as other studies have hypothesized (e.g., Finkel; Hendershott, 1989; Pittman & Bowen, 1994), experiences continue after a move. In this study, the experiences of mobility changed as life continued to unfold for these participants. The narrative approach used in this study allowed for the observation of these changes and the participants were able to reveal the connection between experiences and meanings.

The three stories placed mobility in the wider context of the participants' lives, allowing the reader to observe how the meaning of mobility changed relative to other events. At times, mobility assumed a central role in the creation of the stories, while at other times it took a peripheral stance. Sometimes mobility was seen as an undesirable change and a source of distress; other times, mobility was seen as a welcome change. As the meanings of mobility changed, so did the experience of the relocation. As Claudia, Danielle, and Leona were faced with the relocation process, their experiences changed depending on the meanings they derived from their relocation, the events that took place in their lives, and their reactions to the process of adaptation. This observation concurs with the transition model proposed by Chick and Meleis (1986), that suggests that well-being and adaptation depend on the transition event, its dimensions, its interaction with the environment, individual responses, and meanings obtained from the process.

One example of the evolution of the meaning ascribed to relocation is Leona's differing views of her relocation from Yellowknife to Saskatchewan. What first appeared to be a disruption of her well-managed life in northern Canada, later was seen as an opportunity to further her studies and a chance to be close to her beloved relatives. Another example is how the experience of multiple relocations changed as the participants saw them as an inevitable part of their parents'



lives. For Claudia, the repeated relocations during childhood were connected with the experiences of meeting new people and discovering new possibilities in new environments. Later in life, the repeated moves were seen as a consequence of financial instability, and they represented added stress in her life. For Danielle, multiple relocations were simply an inevitable aspect of military life from which she could not escape. Change was all around her; she was required to leave others and others left her. For Danielle, the realization of having no control over the constant moves meant repeated experiences of loss, which she counteracted with limited connectedness with others. For Leona, repeated geographical relocation during childhood was experienced as a normal part of her life, but as the years went by and her father continued to control the family's relocation needs, she understood her need to take control of her own life. For Leona, life as a contemporary nomad meant repeated experiences of verbal abuse, rejection, and isolation that could only be ended by claiming control over her own life and establishing stability and a sense of belonging in one community.

Multiple meanings emerged through the narratives as the participants reflected on their past. Without losing sight of the individual stories, each containing their own meanings and experiences, it was important to address common meanings derived by the three participants as they looked back at the events that took place in their lives. As adults, all three participants viewed multiple geographical relocations as an impediment to developing long-term relationships and a source of loss. Their sorrows were expressed in different ways, such as the loss of childhood friends, the absence of connections, the loss of normative experiences, or the loss of history. As difficult as their experiences were, and despite the many losses, the three women who participated in this study were able to highlight the gains they obtained from their experiences, such as geographical knowledge, appreciation of travel and other cultures, and appreciation for the women they became.

In making sense of their lives as nomads, these participants shaped their stories to explain who they have become and to tell stories of success, despite the challenges they endured. Their stories of mobility were presented as the stories of their lives. As such, multiple geographical mobility was placed alongside all other important events that shaped who they have become.

Claudia focused on the relationships she developed and the many landscapes she explored as a form of explaining her positive experiences during elementary school. Later, she told stories of the many challenges she faced at home and at school as a way to describe how stressful life was for her during her adolescent years. Danielle focused her story on her difficulties adapting to each new school, both in terms of academic achievement and social integration, and linked many elements in her life to her low self-esteem and lack of control. Her story was highlighted by child treatment practices when she was growing up, her relationships at home, and the influences of the military on her family life. Leona's narrative was centred on her multiple needs to overcome rejection and to establish a sense of belonging. She focused her story on the meanings she derived from her experiences within the school system and from the support within her family, and on how she was able to pursue and create a life where she is accepted as a valued member of a group.

Shaw and Pangnam (1975) suggested that family relocation is neither intrinsically good nor bad, and that adjustment is dependent on the combination of a child's psychosocial development, past experiences, the family, and social forces surrounding the event. The cumulative reports of the experiences and meanings contained in this research and other earlier studies provide support for this perspective. I expand this notion by placing mobility in a larger developmental and historical context. When seen as part of the whole of one's life, geographical mobility loses its centrality and becomes one of many important events that helped shape the life

under investigation. As such, the experience and meaning of mobility change relative to the enormity of one's life's experiences.

Although our lives can be strongly marked by an important event, such as the loss of a loved one or the unexpected recovery from an illness, we continue to experience other events that may become more central in our life story, such as the development of a long-lasting relationship or the progress we make towards important goals in our lives. Multiple geographical mobility is a continuing process that has impact in children's lives, but it occurs alongside a host of many other events that can enhance or diminish one's life experiences.

#### *The Process of Multiple Geographical Relocations: What Counts as Important*

One of the objectives of this study was to obtain an understanding of the process of multiple geographical relocations during childhood and adolescence. As each case was discussed, highlighted by the participant's own interpretation of events, it became apparent that the three narratives provide a context that enhances the understanding of repeated geographical relocation. This research brings forth the nuances of each of the individual stories and their complex interconnections, providing an understanding of multiple geographical relocations as a continuous and evolving process.

As each story was interpreted, different elements of adaptation emerged. Despite the growing number of variables included in adaptation models and in correlational studies investigating the process of relocation adjustment, a small group of them seem particularly relevant across each of the narratives.

*Family support: Stability and self-worth.* The connection between parent and child, as well as other forms of family relationships, has been included in studies of relocation adaptation. Stubblefield (1995) interpreted family relationships as the most stabilizing factor for the mobile child. Positive relationship with parents has been connected with a child's enhanced ability to

cope with a move and to make friends (Goldberg, 1980; Gordon & Gordon, 1958). Mobile children with behaviour problems were reported to have less-involved parents, both in preparing their children for the move and in helping them make friends and becoming involved in the community (Gabower, 1960). Finkel (2001) observed that a positive mother-child relationship was related to lower level of loneliness, social anxiety, and externalizing or internalizing behaviours, and higher ratings of self-esteem. In addition, the quality of the adolescent-parent relationship was identified as the largest unique contribution to adolescent personal adjustment (Pittman & Bowen, 1994).

Claudia was explicit about the role her family connections played in her life, and stated that her family was the constant and stable aspect of her ever-changing life. For Leona, the predictability and support she obtained from her family from Saskatchewan was a source of strength that helped carry her through her days. Danielle, on the other hand, indicated that she had no relatives at hand, that her father was uninvolved and did not provide nurturance, and that the age gap between her and her siblings presented an obstacle to forming a close relationship with either of them. The only positive relationship in Danielle's story was her emotional connection with her mother, who was reported to be warm but also uninvolved in her life.

For Leona in particular, the family connections appear to have provided her with a strong sense of self-worth, despite the opposite feedback she received as she was verbally abused and rejected by members of her peer group. For Claudia, her identification as a member of a growing family provided her with the nurturance she needed when she was not yet connected with friends. Her positive attachment to family members was translated into an increased ability to develop positive attachments with schoolmates and others outside the family. Danielle's experience, on the other hand, highlighted the absence of nurturing ties and her life-long struggle with low self-

esteem. For her, there was nothing to feel good about, and there was no support around her to convince her of her self-worth.

*Person-environment fit: Belonging and the experience of self.* Stokol and Shumaker (1982) suggested that adjustment to relocation is dependent on one's perception of how well the new environmental conditions accommodate one's important goals and activities. Environmental conditions are not only those related to the residential setting, but also include other non-residential domains that are relevant to an individual's current pattern of activities.

For Claudia, the physical residential environment proved to be an important factor in her story. She connected her several homes and the diverse landscapes to the activities they supported in her life and the new possibilities they afforded her. Likewise, Leona found important support in the athletic and recreational activities she joined after school hours, such as the sports team she was able to join and her visits to the Boys and Girls Club.

Relocation adaptation was connected with the school environment in all of the narratives. For Danielle, the school environment was most important in her story. Although she spent time in playgrounds and on the streets playing with neighbours and with her younger sister, her story of mobility was centred on school adaptation. The school environment in the stories encompassed the qualities of the students in the school (e.g., cultural similarity, ability to accept differences, welcoming nature); the quality of teacher-student relationship (e.g., teachers' ability to help newcomers achieve their social and academic needs); and, the quality of the opportunities each school offered or failed to offer (e.g., art classes, gym classes, academic challenge program, academic assistance program, or counselling).

The participants' ability to become integrated with social groups within the school system was related to a sense of belonging and provided participants with an outlet for self-expression and a sense of self-worth and identity within the newly developed social ties. Leona was only

able to show her sense of humour, intellectual abilities, and wit to a small group of people who were eventually able to see beyond her physical appearance. Claudia experienced a period of time of introspection and isolation when she felt disconnected from other students in her school. For Danielle, life in school, even on the better days, never allowed her to express the rebel she had inside, to achieve the academic standard she wanted to achieve, or to feel like a valued member of the school environment.

*School adaptation: Academic ability, social skills, and the school environment.* Schooling was a major component in Danielle and Leona's stories. The level of well-being they achieved in each community was related to their ability to become integrated in the school environment. When entering a new school, children are faced with the need to find an acceptable place among their new peers, to meet academic and behavioural standards for their new school, and to be accepted as an appropriate member of the assigned class (Holland-Jacobsen, Holland, & Cook, 1984). Claudia, Danielle, and Leona maintained the same level of academic achievement throughout their schooling years, supporting prior studies that observed that achievement level following relocation is a function of prior achievement (Blane, Pilling, & Fogelman, 1985; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Strand, 2002; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). Although Danielle attributed her academic difficulties partially to curriculum differences between the several schools she attended, the increased rate of mobility did not increase her difficulties. Even when trying to meet the academic requirements in Ontario, when she was placed in a classroom with students one year older than she was, Danielle was able to successfully complete all but one core subject, which she needed to repeat.

As Danielle and Leona described their immersion in each new school environment, they linked their adaptation level to their academic aptitude, their social skills, and the quality of the support system available within the school. Danielle added that with each move she had a new

curriculum and new rules to follow. For Leona, with each move she had to struggle to establish herself as a valued member of the group. Claudia, on the other hand, described her experiences in school only briefly, just so she could explain that school life was never a concern for her. Her academic ability, social skills, supportive teachers, and welcoming student environment helped her succeed academically and socially. Apart from making sure she never missed the bus in the morning, she had nothing else to worry about. Her only social difficulties, which occurred between junior and high school, were not linked to geographical mobility. The constant residential moves she experienced in those days were only a background to the more challenging issues she and her family faced.

*Timing of geographic mobility: Time of the year, age, and school grade.* Many studies have investigated the mediating effect of age on several measures of adaptation following relocation. Cross-studies comparisons are difficult due to the varying foci and methods used in each study. Some studies observe better outcomes during early childhood (Barret & Noble, 1973; Pinder, 1989); others observe no age differences (Kroger, 1980a; Stroh & Brett, 1990b); and, others suggest a higher vulnerability during adolescence (Calabrese, 1989; Pinder, 1989). In this study, age of relocation was associated with friendships within the school environment, with both Danielle and Leona making reference to the ease of bonding with other children during early elementary school. This was an especially strong factor in Leona's narrative, where she was able to develop her ideas about what makes elementary school a more welcoming place for newcomers.

Both Danielle and Leona were emphatic about their preference for entering a new school at the beginning of the school year, and Danielle found it particularly helpful to enter a new school during a normative transition, either at the beginning of junior high or at the beginning of high school. For Danielle, a mid-year arrival was related to difficulties breaking into groups, not

knowing the unwritten social norms of the groups, not knowing what teachers had already covered in class, and not knowing the physical environment. For Leona, her difficulties remained centred around fitting in and developing a sense of belonging, which was easier early in the school year, when relationship circles were being formed.

*Repeated moves: Adjustment-stability cycles.* The narratives presented in this study support the notion that geographical relocation places many demands on children during the relocation process. As children and adolescents are faced with a nomadic lifestyle, they are faced with the recurring need to leave what they know and to adapt to a new life in a new location. The narratives presented in this thesis revealed the resilience of the three women who participated in this study, and how they were able to overcome many challenges in their lives. They were able to move cities several times and to adapt to each new situation, even when these were not the most desirable locations. Their lives were disrupted and their relationships and homes were left behind. They followed their parents, set up their lives in new places, dealt with several academic, social, and contextual differences, and eventually found ways to live their lives in new environments. Although, at times, their new lives were far from what they had hoped, they managed to the best of their ability.

Their lives were characterized by transition cycles as suggested in the literature (Chick & Meleis, 1986; Shaw & Pangman, 1975). Transitions, according to Chick and Meleis (1986), “are those periods in between fairly stable states” (p.238), when the person is presented with changing experiences of the self until a new stable level is reached. Shaw and Pangman observed in their study of military children that mobility disorganizes one’s life arrangements and requires personal resources to reach another level of balance. Danielle adapted by choosing to limit her connection with others, avoiding the recurring pain associated with the loss of friendships. In this way, life for her remained constantly lonely. Claudia always explored her physical and social



environment, finding her place at home, at school, and in the community not too long after her arrival in a new location. As for Leona, even when life was far from what she expected, she dealt with her isolation and learned to live her life in solitude as needed.

### *Reflections on Research Quality*

What are the meanings and experiences of multiple geographical relocations for children and adolescents? For the purposes of this study, I was interested in identifying different experiences and meanings, and understanding the process of adaptation to each and every new school, community, or social group. I wondered how the participants had coped with their ever changing environments during childhood and adolescence and about the long-term meanings and experiences derived from their nomadic lifestyle.

At this point, I urge readers to ask the question whether this study was able to answer the questions it set out to investigate. I believe this study was successful at attaining this goal. This research was able to explore the many meanings and experiences the participants encountered during childhood and adolescence. One of the strengths of this study lies in its ability to capture the complexity of the nomadic lifestyle for the young student. This study was able to highlight the evolving nature of the process of relocation; it was able to connect a complex web of variables into a coherent explanation of the narratives created during the development of this study; and, it expanded the literature by exploring meanings and by providing new interpretations and views of the role of multiple geographical mobility in the lives of young children and adolescents.

This study is unique in its approach to the study of mobility. It provides a large body of literature, both theoretical and research-based, as a backdrop for the current research, and it introduces narrative theory to the study of repeated geographical relocation. This approach was

useful in addressing gaps in the literature, as it facilitated the exploration of the complexity of the nomadic lifestyle and the understanding of its process.

Although this study relied on only three participants to share their experiences with multiple relocations, it encompasses many other contemporary nomads. All contemporary nomads who contributed to earlier studies are also represented in this research as their reports were incorporated throughout this thesis, both in the literature review and in all interpretations and discussions of findings. It is important to consider the narratives as examples of the lives of women who grew up with frequent mobility, and therefore their experiences may not be reflective of the experiences a male student might have encountered. Another limitation of this study is associated with the use of retrospective accounts of experience. As such, it is important to keep in mind that although this study was able to obtain information directly from those who experienced the process of frequent mobility, the information is a reflection of the adult contemporary nomad recalling their early experiences.

Quality of craftsmanship, quality of the narratives, persuasiveness, and coherence of the study were some of the guiding principals of research quality followed throughout this research process. The richness of the life stories present in this study speaks to the amount of care and dedication to the groundwork completed before each of the interviews, and the dedication and involvement of the participants who devoted hours of their time to complete interviews, review transcripts, and revise the narratives. The careful analytical and writing process contributed to the creation of narratives that are coherent, evocative, and relevant. Prior to the completion of this study, these narratives were evaluated by the participants, by three different colleagues, and by the academic body involved in the research committee, and they all share the same opinion about the quality of the narratives.

The approval of the narratives by the participants speaks to the narratives' adequacy in reflecting the participants' experiences with geographical mobility. Further corroboration was obtained by the support in the literature and the approval received from the academic community involved with this research. Even though these peer reviews attest to the achievement of varying levels of quality in this study, the attribution of quality is a continuous process and subject to revision. I hope other readers will continue to evaluate this research with the intention of creating new questions and possibilities for knowledge creation.

A final criterion used to maintain the quality of this study is what Kvale (1995) referred to as pragmatic validity. This refers to the impact of this research on the creation of future studies and on the creation or change of action. As is explained in Chapter Three, pragmatic validity has to do with the impact of this study on the lives of others. With this in mind, I move to the next section of this chapter to discuss the implication of this study for families, counsellors, and researchers.

### *Implications*

This thesis was developed around my personal interest in the topic of multiple geographical relocations, my involvement with counselling, and my interest in the quality of life of children. In this section, I discuss the personal meaning I derive from this work and what possible implications it might have for parents, counsellors, and other researchers.

#### *Personal Implications*

At a personal level, this research has both confirmed some of my apprehensions about frequent relocation as well as shed some positive light in my thinking about the experience and meaning of a nomadic lifestyle for the school age child. The stories of the three women who participated in this study helped me balance my initial concerns about multiple geographical relocations with a strengthened awareness of children's resiliency. Yes, repeated geographical

relocation can bring about many challenges, but the research to date, including this thesis, appear to support the notion that children are capable of surpassing these challenges.

As a parent, I ask myself, what kind of life story do I want for my own children and what kind of experiences do I wish to offer them? This is a subjective decision-making process that requires that we review our beliefs and the definition of quality of life. Some children do appear to survive the challenges that come with multiple relocations and learn from those experiences, but the question remains whether the benefits of relocation outweigh the challenges. I agree with Danielle that children should not have to go through the types of experiences that she had to cope with, such as feeling like an object and mistreated by uncaring teachers. Considering my personal background, having grown up enjoying large family gatherings and having established roots in a community, I find it difficult to envision my own children living as nomads. However, life does not always give us a choice. If I am confronted with the task of relocating my children I will benefit from the knowledge acquired through the completion of this thesis and the research to date, and from my renewed awareness of children's resiliency.

### *Implications for Parents*

Parents who are faced with beginning or continuing a nomadic lifestyle are well advised to weigh the potential costs and benefits of multiple relocations. The costs and benefits will vary relative to each child's resources and needs, and to the complex web of factors that may affect adaptation. Consideration of the various factors discussed in the previous section (e.g., person-environment fit, family support, school adaptation, and timing of the move) may facilitate this assessment. Parents can use these different focal points to assess their child's potential for positive adaptation to frequent relocations. A parent may, for example, consider the child's academic inclination and expectations, and evaluate the opportunities that potential schools have to offer. Another example is the case where the relocation is associated with improved quality of

living due to increased financial security, allowing parents to meet more of their children's needs. As each life and family is unique, these focal points are just some of the ways parents can start thinking about whether to relocate or to stay in the same geographical location.

As with families dealing with other types of transition, parents are encouraged to become aware of their children's needs and to seek ways to support them through the process of adaptation, recognizing that children will have different needs at different times. Parents are also encouraged to seek support within the community and to access resources offered by the local school. As the ancient African proverb says, "it takes a village to raise a child".

### *Implications for Counselling*

The experience of repeated geographical relocation, according to the participants in this study, corroborates many current counselling practices designed to help the mobile child. These practices focus on several of the main issues highlighted in the stories, including community and school integration, exploration of emotions, academic support, social skills training, provision of knowledge of rules and academic programs, as well as helping the newcomer cope with personal issues unrelated to the mobility event.

With a large student body in each school and many counsellors working for several schools as consultants, it may be helpful for counsellors to have a list of community services and resources readily available to new students and their families. As intuitive and simple as this measure may appear, sometimes it may be all that a client needs to enhance adaptation. It may mean immediate help to those in need instead of a lengthy wait for an appointment. This information resource may be as simple as a collection of websites offering information about entertainment, public parks, reading clubs, and art festivals. Information on social assistance, affordable housing, financial support, respite services for single parents, and teen groups may also be helpful. Newcomers may also be interested in information about academic and non-

academic pursuits outside of the school system, such as academic enhancement programs, athletic clubs, Girls Guides or Boys Scouts, bike trails, lakes, rivers, hiking, or skiing. This is just some of the information that newcomers might be interested in learning about.

Knowing that a client has recently moved, it is important to open discussion about the changes that are still occurring in his or her life, and to explore the experiences of these changes and how they relate to the client's current situation. Considering the suggestion that positive family relationships may represent a benefit to student relocation adaptation, counsellors or educators faced with challenges in helping a newcomer could invite one supportive family member into the helping process. It also seems pertinent for the helping professional to encourage the client to explore the person-environment fit and the experiences of the self as one possible way of helping the client expand his or her story and opening opportunities for creating new meanings of his or her experiences.

It was in her adolescent years that Claudia started feeling the various stresses in her life. On the verge of "burnout", Claudia was able to find stress relief through exercise and open conversations with close friends. She took the initiative to go for long bike rides and asked a teacher for information about dance lessons. Claudia also sought the help of her few friends, who were able to listen to her problems and encouraged her not to feel responsible for her mother's behaviour.

Danielle, on the other hand, obtained no help, and she was clear about her disappointment with the lack of services in the schools she attended. For Danielle, help could have come in the form of academic support, social skills training, and a program for enhancing her self-esteem. A counsellor could have challenged Danielle's coping mechanism, which prevented her from forming close relationships, and helped her to find alternate ways of dealing with past and future losses.

School programs and teachers training could have deterred the unchecked bullying that Leona experienced. Her resiliency, her ability to find her niche wherever she went (e.g., school teams, community clubs and sports, academic interests), and the support she received from her relatives were her greatest assets in overcoming the challenges she faced.

Counsellors working with mobile students may face the challenge of not having enough time with these students to make significant progress. If the first meeting precedes relocation, counsellors can make the best use of their limited time by offering practical advice to parents and students in terms of accessing services in the new location, and by addressing any pressing issues the child may be dealing with, such as anxiety, behavioural changes, or poor academic performance. When time is available, counsellors and students can work towards forming a relationship where the student can express their emotions and identify their needs. In addition to helping these students access support within the school and the community, counsellors can use cognitive behavioural therapy, narrative therapy, and group sessions to help students and their families cope with their challenges, as well as life skills to deal with future transitions.

Counsellors working with a large mobile population are encouraged to become familiar with the literature on counselling programs that address pre- and post-relocation needs, and work with their clients to develop skills that can facilitate their future adaptation to new environments. Counsellors working with adults who were mobile students may need to address any lingering emotional or behavioural concerns that may be impacting their lives as a result of their nomadic lifestyle. Clients may not always make the connection between their present concerns and their history of mobility, and there may not even be one, but this is a hypothesis that could be explored.

Counsellors are also encouraged to assess their approach effectiveness, and to be willing to question their views of quality of life and the impact of these views in their work with mobile

families. Effectiveness involves connecting clients to other resources, and therefore helping professionals are encouraged to seek ways to coordinate efforts with other schools and programs, both within the community and between communities.

### *Future Research*

There is a lack of research investigating the effectiveness and impact of various school and community programs designed to help newcomers adapt to their new environments. It is important to investigate accessibility, cost, degree of satisfaction, and gaps in these programs. Furthermore, schools and counsellors would benefit from research investigating best practices in coordinating existing services to newcomers within one's community and between cities. Advances in technology and improved access to computers may facilitate the coordination of these services. For example, long-distance learning may become useful in coordinating differences between curricula, and school websites may contain links to other school boards, thereby facilitating the access and transfer of information between school administrative staff and counsellors.

Although there are many books directed at helping children cope with fear and anxiety prior to moving (e.g., *The Year My Parents Ruined My Life*, by Martha Freeman; *We're Moving*, by Heather Maisner; *Let's Talk About Moving to a New Place*, by Diana Helmer), there are few academic studies exploring children's experiences as they are required to leave familiar settings. The available reports of these experiences come from helping professionals and from school programs aimed at helping children and adolescent cope with their emotions. Further emotion-focused studies are needed in order to expand on the results of this study and to further explore the sources and resolutions of the emotions children and adolescents experience during the relocation adaptation process.



There is a large body of correlational studies investigating variables thought to mediate the impact of mobility. There is a need for more qualitative studies, especially studies directed at obtaining information directly from those who have experienced the relocation. Researchers interested in replicating this study could consider obtaining narratives from children in the process of moving and attempt to include stories from both male and female participants. Further studies could also use longitudinal designs to obtain information from children at various points throughout their process of adapting to a new environment.

The role of hope has been researched in the field of counselling, especially as it relates to the experience of loss. Considering geographical mobility involves the experience of multiple losses, it is surprising that hope has not been investigated within this context. How are hopes and dreams connected to geographical mobility, and how do mobile children feed their hopes as they experience multiple losses? Studies in this area would inform counselling practices.

#### *Concluding Remarks*

The narratives created in the context of this study and the interpretations here provided represent a moment in the process of knowledge development. As a study rooted in a constructionist epistemology, the stories and interpretations of repeated geographical mobility are taken to be a product of the social forces surrounding the production of this thesis. Further and different interpretations are certainly possible, but it is hoped that the reader can find some resonance with the stories and dialogue between the stories and the background research presented in this thesis.

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## Appendix A

### Advertisement for Joining the Study

Opportunity to partake in a study of frequent relocation conducted by a graduate researcher in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education from the University of Saskatchewan. If you are 18 years of age or older, if you moved at least 4 times from city to city within Canada while going through elementary and high school, if you would like an opportunity to tell your story to a graduate student of what it was like to grow up with such frequent relocations, and if you are willing to meet with the researcher for two interviews and/or communicate with me by phone, then you are invited to volunteer to partake in this study. Bookings of interview will commence in September at your convenience. Please contact the researcher directly for further information and thank you for your interest. Researcher: Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins. Phone: (780) 988 0826. Email: [fabiola@shaw.ca](mailto:fabiola@shaw.ca)

## Appendix B

### Letter to Participants – Description of the Study

#### Life Stories of Frequent Geographical Relocation During Childhood and Adolescence: A Narrative Study

**Researcher:** Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins

Master of Education candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan.

Phone: (780) 988 0826 E-mail: [fabiola@shaw.ca](mailto:fabiola@shaw.ca)

Supervisor: Stephanie Martin, (306) 966 5259

Dear Participant,

You are invited to partake in a study of experiences of growing up in the midst of multiple relocations while attending elementary and high school. The information gained in this research project will be used toward my Masters degree in Counselling Psychology. My interest in this topic comes from my own cross-cultural experiences, and from my recent experience relocating my family to another province. Also, as a psychology student, I have always been interested in the interaction between a person's development and the social environment where the person resides. As families continue to move in search of better opportunities, or for other personal reasons, it is important to expand our knowledge with more comprehensive studies related to relocation. I am particularly interested in learning about the multiple tasks of adaptation to new environments required of students who experienced a minimum of four geographical relocations.

**Background and Purpose of the Study:**

Research in this area has predominantly focused on individual aspects of adaptation, such as school achievement, loneliness, self-concept, etc., and has neglected to consider the entire process of adaptation, involving the person, the family, the school, the community, and the broader social context of the move. Long-term implications of relocations have also been scarce in the literature. The purpose of this research is to obtain a deeper understanding of the evolving process of repeated geographical relocation during childhood and adolescence, and to examine the short- and long-term meaning of growing up within the context of environmental/cultural changes for the adult participant.

**Role of Participants:**

This study cannot be completed without the stories you have to tell about your frequent geographical relocations. I thank you for taking the time to consider taking part in this study. If you decide to embark in this project with me, I will be inviting you to share with me during the first interview your story of experiencing multiple relocations. I am interested in hearing not only about the things that happened as a result of your relocations, but also about your thoughts and feelings about your experiences. Please understand that there is no right way to tell a story, and your story, the one you choose and prefer to tell, is the story I want to hear. Just tell your story as it comes to mind. During the second interview I will have an opportunity to ask you questions

about your story. The purpose of these questions will be for me to have a better understanding of the complexities of your experiences.

Each interview will last no more than 120 minutes. If you have time before the interviews, I kindly ask you to think back about your experiences and to jot down any recollections that stand out for you. As a means of helping you prepare for our time together, I have enclosed some questions that I might ask you during our meetings.

As the stories we tell are created within relationships, our time together will be videotaped to allow me to observe more carefully the context in which your stories will be developed. I will also be creating written copies of each interview, with all identifying information removed from the transcripts. You will be asked to read the written copies and you will be allowed to change, add, or remove any part of the interview transcript. Because it is my goal to accurately retell your story in my study, I will also be asking for your feedback pertaining to the accuracy of my retelling of your life story of repeated geographical relocation. You will be asked to share with me these three separate revisions in person or by phone, and I will record these conversations in order to aid me in writing your story. I may need to contact you for clarification or further information until no more revisions of the story are required.

**Confidentiality:**

I will be personally reviewing the videos of our interviews and I will create full transcripts of what was said. I will remove or modify all identifying information in the transcripts before presenting it to you, so you will have a chance to verify whether revisions are sufficient to protect your privacy. These transcripts will be shared with my supervisors, and I might ask for your consent to allow me to use verbatim excerpts from the transcripts in the thesis. Until the final draft is written, all videotapes, transcripts, rough drafts, notes, computer discs, and participants' names and contact information will be kept securely locked under my care. All these materials will be safely stored by the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education for five years, as per regulation of the University of Saskatchewan.

**Risks and Benefits:**

As a participant, you will be invited to share personal information with me. Although the content of what you tell might have been shared many times before with other friends or acquaintances, as our interview progresses you might disclose information of a more personal nature that might bring back distressing emotions. Many times, the release of these emotions brings about an opportunity for personal growth and better understanding of where we have been and where we are in our lives. It is my intent to provide you with a warm, empathic, and non-judgemental environment, one in which you will feel safe to explore all emotions. I expect this experience to be a rewarding one for you.

Thank you for being willing to generously share your time and experiences with me. If you have any questions about this study, please call me collect at (780) 988 0826, or contact me via E-mail at [fabiola@shaw.ca](mailto:fabiola@shaw.ca)

Yours truly,

Fabiola

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent Form

#### **Life Stories of Frequent Geographical Relocation During Childhood and Adolescence: A Narrative Study**

**Researcher:** Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins

Master of Education candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan.

Phone: (780) 988 0826 E-mail: [fabiola@shaw.ca](mailto:fabiola@shaw.ca)

Supervisor: Stephanie Martin, (306) 966 5259

I understand that I am volunteering to participate in a study about the experiences of repeated geographical relocation during school years. I also understand that as part of this study I will be asked to share my thoughts, feelings, and stories about my experiences growing up in the midst of frequent relocations. I am willing to share my experiences with the researcher, but I also understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

I understand that I will be interviewed in person twice by the researcher, each interview lasting no more than 120 minutes. These interviews will be videotaped to aid the researcher in observing the context in which my stories will be told, and audio tapes will be produced as a back up. I understand that I'll have the right to interrupt videotaping at any time during the session. Transcripts of each interview will be created, and I will be asked to review them, at which point I will be allowed to add, change, or remove any kind of information as I see necessary. These revisions will then be discussed with the researcher. Following the two interviews, and the two transcript revisions, the researcher will begin analysis and composition of my life story of repeated geographical relocation, and I will be asked once again to provide input about the accuracy of the researcher's retelling of my story. Revisions of transcripts and discussion of the created life story will take place over the phone or in person, and the researcher will once again record these conversations to enable her to make necessary changes to more accurately express my experiences with regards to frequent relocations. I understand that in addition to these two interviews, and the three feedback discussions, the researcher may need to contact me for clarification or further information.

I understand that no one else will have access to the videotapes of our interviews. I also understand that transcripts will be shared with the researcher's supervisors, but not until all identifying information has been removed, and not before I have had the chance to review them. I understand that information collected during our conversations will be used for Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins' Masters thesis, and for possible future publication or professional presentations. Verbatim excerpts will only be included in the final story with my consent. Until the final draft is written, all videotapes, transcripts, rough drafts, notes, computer discs, and participants' names and contact information will be kept securely locked under the researcher's care. At the completion of the study, all transcripts and videotapes will be securely stored for three years by the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education of the University of



Saskatchewan. **I understand that prior to the final version of my life experiences as told by the researcher becoming available to the public, I will have a chance to remove any information I feel uncomfortable releasing for publication. I believe this study is well prepared to protect my privacy during this study.**

I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## Appendix D

### Interview Guiding Questions

The first interview is directed at giving as much room as possible for the participant to create his or her own story, and therefore the researcher will remain relatively quiet during the process. The first interview will be guided by questions such as the following:

- “I am interested in hearing not only about the things that happened as a result of your relocations, but also about your thoughts and feelings about your experiences. Please understand that there is no right way to tell a story, and your story, the one you choose and prefer to tell, is the story I want to hear. Just tell your story as it comes to mind.”
- “Please, tell me what you remember of your experiences of relocation during your elementary and high school years.”
- “When you think back to your experiences growing up with relocations, what stories stand out for you?”
- “If you were to write a book of your experiences in elementary and high school, how many chapters would you include in your book?”
- “Tell me the stories that stand out for you in each chapter”.
- “What would you call each chapter?”
- “How about your book, what would it be called?”
- “As you were sharing these stories with me today, was there anything in particular that really stood out for you?”

The second interview will be directed at filling gaps in the story and further exploration of content shared in the first interview. The second interview will be guided but not limited to the following questions:

- “Please, tell me about the things that were going on for you before your first move (second, third, etc.).”
- “Going back to that time (first move, second move, etc.), what thoughts do you remember going through your mind?”
- “I wonder about the feelings that those events and thoughts stirred up for you at that time.”
- “Could you tell me some of your family stories as you lived through this first relocation (second, third, etc.)?”
- “What do you recall of your community?”
- “Taking all that you have shared so far about your first move (second, third, etc.), all the events, your feelings, and thoughts about it, how does it all fit together?”
- How did you change as a person as a result of these frequent relocations?”

Appendix E  
Video Release Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, authorize the release of this video recording to Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins to be used in the manner described in the research Consent Form.

I have a copy of this Video Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher

Appendix F

Data/Transcript Release Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my interview with Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins, and I acknowledge that the document accurately reflects what I shared during the interview. I am satisfied with the efforts that have been taken to ensure that any identifying information of this material has been altered or eliminated. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins to be used in the manner described in the research Consent Form.

I have a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

Appendix G

Sign-Off Release Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the stories of my experiences written by Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins, and I agree that they accurately reflect what I shared in the interviews. I hereby give permission to include the above material, including verbatim excerpts, for inclusion in Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins' (researcher) final written thesis, and/or to be used in the manner as described in the information and consent form. I am satisfied with the efforts that have been taken to ensure that any identifying information on these materials has been altered or eliminated.

I have a copy of the Sign-Off Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## Appendix H

### Behavioural Research Ethics Board

#### Application for Approval of Research Project

#### **1. Name of Researcher, Supervisor and Department**

Stephanie Martin, Supervisor, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education.

##### **1.a Name of student**

Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins, Master of Education Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan.

##### **b. Anticipated Start and Completion Date**

Beginning of data collection is expected to start in September 2005, with completion of the study projected for February 2006.

#### **2. Title of the Study**

Life Stories of Frequent Geographical Relocation During Childhood and Adolescence

#### **3. Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences of repeated geographical relocation during childhood and adolescence, and to examine the short- and long-term meaning of growing up within the context of environmental/cultural changes for the adult participant.

This research will fill several gaps in the literature. It will provide a broader understanding of mobility by focusing on the entire process of repeated relocation. It will provide an emic dimension to the study of the lives of those who experienced repeated

geographical relocation during childhood and adolescence using a different methodology. In addition, it will examine the short- and long-term meaning of multiple relocations to the participants, whom I will refer to as ‘contemporary nomads’. This study will use retrospective accounts of life experiences with the purpose of creating stories of repeated geographical relocation. Through stories, the temporal aspect of adapting to frequent relocation will be highlighted, informing the readers of all events of significance surrounding mobility in the lives of these contemporary nomads, as they repeatedly entered and exited distinct schools, communities, and peer groups. This study is developed around several questions pertaining to the personal experience of relocation, to interpretations of causal links amongst elements surrounding relocation, and to the meaning of these relocations. As these stories will cover the development of the adult participant, these three aspects of relocation - experience, interpretation of causality, and meaning - will be explored as they appeared to the participant in different periods of their lives, up until the present moment as the participant continues to make meaning of all past transitions and experiences.

#### **4. Funding**

No grant or contract has been awarded nor is in application for this study.

#### **5. Participants**

I plan to recruit three to five participants directly through ads posted in universities and colleges in Edmonton and Saskatoon (see advertisement in Appendix A), or indirectly via colleagues who know potential participants. Upon seeing the ads, or hearing about the study from another person, the potential participant will be asked to contact the researcher directly by phone or email. Ads will contain a brief summary of the purpose of the study as well as contact information.

Participants will be selected based on the following criteria: they will be at least 18 years old, they will have experienced multiple geographical relocations within Canada (a minimum of four moves between cities) during elementary and high school years, they will be able to provide a rich account of their experiences, and they will be willing to provide in-depth information about the questions in this study. Participants will have had no prior relationship with the researcher.

## **6. Consent**

Upon initial conversation over the phone/email, I will provide all pertinent information about the study to the participant (as outlined in Appendix B). At that point, the participant will have an opportunity to ask any further questions about the research and to grant verbal consent. Prior to the first interview, I will provide the participant with a second chance to evaluate willingness to embark in this study by once again discussing with the participant all pertinent details of the study. The participant will be asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C) to ratify willingness to partake in the study with full understanding of all that is entailed. A copy of the signed consent form will be given to the participant.

## **7. Methods/Procedures**

The study will be using focused life story interview format to encourage participants to develop retrospective accounts of experience in the form of stories. There will be two interviews, each expected to last up to 120 minutes. The first interview will be very open-ended, allowing participants to tell what they wish about their experiences, with little interference by the researcher. The second interview will be a follow up of the first, when the researcher will ask questions to fill gaps in the participant's account of his or her story and to focus on areas needing more elaboration. From having discussed the study with the



participants, both over the phone and face to face prior to the first interview, participants will already be aware of the content of questions (see guiding questions in Appendix D).

Both interviews will be audio and video taped. Videotapes will be used to enhance my ability to analyze the context in which the stories will be created. Audio tapes will be used as a backup in case the participant chooses to interrupt video recording or in case of problems with the video recording.

After each interview, transcripts will be created and participants will be asked to review them for content and for confidentiality, being able to add, change, or remove any kind of information as they see necessary. These revisions will be discussed with the researcher in person or by phone.

Following the two interviews and the two revisions of content, I will initiate the recreation of each participant's life story. After each story is written, the participant will once again be asked to review the story for accuracy and confidentiality. It may be necessary for the researcher to contact the participants for clarification or for more information until no more revisions of the story are required. All feedback sessions will be recorded in order to aid the researcher in more accurately writing each participant's story. All participants will be asked to sign video and audio release forms (Appendix E), transcript release forms (Appendix F), and a form releasing their final written story (Appendix G) as necessary during the study.

## **8. Storage of Data**

Data transcripts will be stored in floppy disks containing pseudonyms, and interview tapes will be kept safe in a locked drawer in my office until the end of the study. Unless requested otherwise, names and any other identifying information will be changed for the purposes of presenting the thesis and publishing any material related to the research.

Until the final draft is written, all videotapes, transcripts, rough drafts, notes, computer discs, and participants' names and contact information will be kept securely locked under my care. Upon completion of the study, videotapes and all other materials will be safely stored by the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education for three years, as per regulation of the University of Saskatchewan.

## **9. Dissemination of Results**

Data collected will be used to write my thesis. The thesis will be submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan. There is a possibility the data may be used for conference presentations and journal articles.

## **10. Risks or Deception**

There is to be no deception involved in this study.

As for risks, the roads the interview take will depend on the stories the participants will tell as they make meaning of their experiences. It is possible memories will be filled with notes of strength, resilience, family support, and personal growth, in which case, there will be no risk involved. It is also possible that as participants elaborate their stories, they

might disclose sensitive information pertaining to their past or present emotions surrounding their experiences that might be distressing to them. Participants will benefit from this study solely on the basis of the opportunity to review their lives in the context of an empathic relationship with a trained counselling student.

It is expected that participants will leave the interview with a new sense of understanding of where they've been, and who they are, a sense that can be liberating and invigorating for participants. Should any concerns surface throughout this study, I will refer the participant to an appropriate counselling setting.

## **11. Confidentiality**

Participants will be informed verbally and in writing of their rights to confidentiality. They will be given an information and consent form that documents details of the study, including who will have access to the original data, their right to withdraw, and their right to refuse to answer any questions. Signature of the form will signify their understanding of their rights, and will be taken as consent to participate. Prior to each interview, consent will be revisited.

All data will be coded, and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity throughout the duration of the study, and upon its completion. In addition, participants will have a chance to review and revise all transcripts as they see fit to increase confidentiality and anonymity, and each will also be asked to give permission to use excerpts of verbatim material in the thesis.

Upon the explicit request of any of the participants, his or her real name will be included in the final thesis.

## **12. Data/Transcript Release**

By signing a Transcript Release Form (Appendix F) participants acknowledge that the transcript is an accurate reflection of what was shared in the interviews, they agree that the changes made to maintain confidentiality are to their satisfaction, and they consent to release the transcript to the researcher to be used in the manner described in the consent form.

Participants will also be asked to sign a Sign-Off Release Form (Appendix G) indicating that the stories of their experiences as written by the researcher are representative of their experiences and that they consent to have them included in the final document.

## **13. Debriefing and Feedback**

Debriefing will follow at the end of each meeting with the participant. Questions regarding the participants' experience during the interview will be asked, any distress will be addressed with self-care discussions, information will be provided regarding upcoming steps towards completion of the thesis, and participants will be encouraged to bring up any concerns or questions related to the study.

Once the Sign-Off Release Form has been signed, and the thesis completed, participants will receive a personal thank you card along with their own copy of the final completed thesis.

## **14. Required Signatures**

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**Fabiola de Pina-Jenkins – Masters Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education.**

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**Stephanie Martin, Supervisor**

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**Sam Robinson – Acting Department Head, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education.**

## **15. Contact Names and Information:**

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