

Using Metaphoric Unitary Landscape Narratives to Facilitate Pattern Transformation: Fires in the Tallgrass Prairie as a Wellspring of Possibilities

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*Land of the pastoral plains, the grass-fields of the world!
Land of those sweet-aired interminable plateaus!
Land there of herd, the garden, the healthy house
of adobie! Land there of rapt thought, and of the realization
of the stars!*

From Leaves of Grass, Walt Whitman (1860)

Story and Metaphor

Before I discovered the works of Martha Rogers while pursuing a Masters degree at the University of Toronto, I came across a book by David Gordon (1978) titled *Therapeutic Metaphors: Helping Others Through the Looking Glass*. The idea of testing the therapeutic use of metaphor was the first idea I had as a thesis topic. I went on to complete my thesis testing Rogers' Science of Unitary Human Beings (SUHB) focusing on the relationship of pleasant guided imagery with time experience and human field motion (Butcher, 1988) and forgot about the significance of Gordon's work. Now, twenty years later, my research on the potential journaling and storytelling has for enhancing health and well-being has reawakened the idea of using stories rich with metaphor as a poten-

tial unitary patterning modality (Butcher, 2004).

Stories, in one form or another, have been used for ages as a way of conveying information and knowledge to each other and from one generation to the next. Stories may be expressed in the form of poems, novels, fairy tales, fables, parables, songs, movies, jokes, or gossip. Working with people to uncover deep meanings in their stories can create opportunities for healing and hope.

According to Polkinghorne (1988), human language in personal narratives are replete with symbols, figures of speech, metaphors, and similes that serve to illuminate certain themes, convey meaning, filter, and organize the personal story. The storyteller or writer uses metaphors to extend understanding beyond the literal connection creating a deeper

meaning of the events. Generally, metaphor is defined as “a way of speaking in which one thing is expressed in terms of another, whereby this bringing together throws new light on the character of what is being described” (Kopp, 1971, p. 17). “Metaphors are central to explaining our everyday realities. The way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). Metaphors bring about change and transformation by inviting one to view an experience from a new perspective through the making of new connections. Hence, metaphors build bridges between embodied knowledge and abstractions by reconstructing and connecting experiences to meaningful symbols and imagery. The new connections have the potential to reveal deeper insights and meanings about a situation from which new attitudes and actions may arise (Banonis, 1995; Burke, 1984; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These new insights are pathways to a deeper understanding of ourselves and those we care for. People make sense of their world and themselves through the creation of stories. Meaning is created among those telling and listening to the story. Dillard (1982) explained that the meaning from metaphor is what brings forth the mystery expressed in universal themes that become guides toward the light of our being, from birth to death, through the passage of time, and through the journey of life.

Gordon (1978) explained that metaphors in the form of stories, fairy tales, parables, and anecdotes can be used consciously and unconsciously to assist clients in making desired changes. Olds (1992) states that as “meaning transports,” metaphors facilitate the remaking of story thereby extending or understanding of experiences (p. 24). For example, a client may be expressing some experience in which they feel limited in some way, perhaps seeing no choices or alternatives to overcome and transcend a particular situation. At this point, the nurse may tell a story about another client or create a story about how another person who had a similar situation was able to find resolution. Upon hearing the story, if the situation resonates with the client’s own view of the world, he/she may incorporate the resolution into his or her own situation. Expected and unexpected moments in the story can mark the rise and fall of crisis and resolution by working and reworking the story in a way that re-frames a person’s experience.

Narrative therapists and constructivist psychologists deliberately use story and metaphor as a strategy for promoting self-healing (Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995; Rosen & Kuehlwein, 1996; White & Epston, 1990). There is increasing interest in nursing concerning the use of metaphor, storytelling, and myth as a potential healing modality (Banks-Wallace, 1998; Gaydos, 2005; Tuyn, 2003; Watson, 1987). In terms of Rogeian Science, credit must be given to Tuyn (1992; 1994) as being

among the first to see the congruency and relevance of constructivist approaches to counseling such as the use of narratives to the science of Unitary Human Beings. However, there has been no published works on how narratives about landscapes can be used as metaphors to enhance pattern transformation.

Landscape as Narrative

One major source for story and metaphor is our natural environment. People are shaped by their landscape as much as they are shaped by genes (Lopez, 1988). Story-telling, then, is a reflection of the character and subtlety of landscape and context in which we live. Landscape comes alive through the telling and sharing of our stories.

In a view consistent with Rogers' notion of integrality, David Abram (1996) in his brilliant landmark book, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, beautifully demonstrates how human beings throughout time have been "situated in the land in much the same way that characters are situated in story" (p. 163). For thousands of generations, people viewed themselves as part of nature. He illustrates how the language and stories of Western Apache, the Hopi, Navajo, Balinese, Aboriginal people of Australia, and other indigenous cultures have always been intertwined, interpenetrating, interdependent with "the sensible landscape itself" (Abram, 1996, p. 85). In fact, these indigenous cultures "dwell within a

landscape that is alive, aware, and expressive" (p. 139). The "animation" of nature provides human beings a direct relationship with a "many-voiced landscape" (p. ix) and a "sensuous reality" (p. x). Only by affirming the animateness of the landscape do we allow for full immersion and participation with our surrounding landscape. In this way, every tree, creature, the sky, rock, leaf, and blade of grass has its own place-specific mind and intelligence. It is only within this matrix of people and land that is experienced alive where meaning arises and proliferates. The aliveness and sensuousness of landscape made meaningful is illustrated throughout Abram's (1996) book and is a model for creating the metaphoric landscape tallgrass prairie narrative presented later in this paper.

Landscape as a Healing Metaphor

Nightingale (1860) wrote extensively about the importance of internal and external visual experiences, light, color and beauty as effective agents of care and recovery that she felt were basic to nursing. Rogers (1992) also placed great emphasis on the environment in describing the oneness of human beings with their environment. Watson (1999) pointed out how contemporary health settings are incorporating works of beauty, works of art, aesthetics, light, and color, as well as nature to help promote harmony and wholeness.

The idea that landscapes are "therapeutic" is not new. There is a deep-rooted notion in contem-

porary society that contact with nature and natural landscape is a source for personal and social health benefits (Parry-Jones, 1990). The textures, sounds, smells, and visual scenery the environment have always been sources of inspiration where the human spirit is nourished and renewed. Williams (1999) explains that the concept of the therapeutic landscape is concerned with a holistic, socio-ecological model of health that focuses on the complex interactions that include the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, societal and environmental.

Walking in Beauty

Palka (1999) found that wilderness national parks are places of healing where the environment promotes wellness by facilitating relaxation and restoration enhancing both physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Williams (2002) further argues that while the literature points to the use of therapeutic landscapes for healing and the recovery process, they can also be used in the maintenance of health and well-being. Sheppard (1994) noted that the natural world in particular is a source for healing. She described how taking beautiful photographs of the sea was particularly therapeutic for a terminally ill client she cared for and noted how "a rainbow, a beautiful sunset, the sound of a loon quavering across a northern lake all engender awe within us" (Sheppard, 1994, p. 105). For many people, such awe inspiring images are a source for hope, peacefulness, happiness,

relaxation, and healing. Knopf (1987) pointed to four potential reasons that natural landscape is a benefit: a) nature restores; b) it facilitates competence building; c) it carries symbols that affirm culture or self; and d) landscape offers a pleasing diversion.

This paper offers an additional way in which engagement with landscape may be a source for well-being. The activity of writing about and/or sharing richly constructed metaphorical narratives about the healing nature of landscapes maybe an additional source of health patterning. This paper includes an example of a self-created story rich with metaphor that I created, and recreated, which has served as a source of strength, renewal, and self-healing in my own unfolding life journey.

Tallgrass Prairie

One's environment is rich source for the discovery of landscapes that may be turned into metaphor. Ever since moving to Iowa, I've been tuned into the rhythms, textures, beauty, and magic of the tallgrass prairie. For thousands of years an open tallgrass prairie covered more than 400,000 square miles of North America stretching from Manitoba, covering northwestern Indiana, the northern two thirds of Illinois to the eastern parts of the Dakotas and Nebraska, and extending down through western Missouri, eastern Kansas, and into eastern Oklahoma (Olson & Madson, 2005). Of the four great biomes of North America, desert, tundra, forest, and grassland, the grassland is the

largest. Heat-Moon (1991) appropriately wrote that the one singular metaphor that described the vast prairie was an “ocean of grass” since “this land is like the sea and it is of the sea” (p. 114). In the words of poet, nature writer, and scholar William A. Quayle (1905), “the prairie is the sea of the land” (p. 49). Iowa, unlike any other state, was almost entirely covered (85%) by a 30 million acre tallgrass prairie (Price, 2004).

Reports from French explorers in the 1600s were the first to describe the endless treeless lands. However, the tallgrass prairie was long the home for the Sauk, Iowa, Fox, Sioux, Mesquakies, Osages, Kaws, Poncas, as well as a host of other tribes. The term “prairie” was commonly used in France and Quebec to describe grassland. Ever since one of the early explorers, Pere Jacques Marquette noted 1673 in his Journal of the “*belles preies*,” the term has lasted to describe the boundless, vast, rich grasslands. *Prerie* it was then; prairie it would become when adopted and anglicized by the English (Madson, 1995).

No other landscape has been or continues to be as important and misunderstood as the American grasslands (Kinsey, 1996). Often, the vast grasslands were described as “too simple, too monotonous, and befitting their form, too plain” (Kinsey, 1996, p. 3). The ocean of grass was even viewed as a “sublime void,” (p. 11) “vast desert,” (p. 15) and “wasteland” (Kinsey, 1996, p. 15).

As waves of settlers moved westward, the vast domains of the unbroken tallgrass prairie became fragmented. In a very short span of time, towns sprang up, ranches fenced in, land was tilled for farms. People quickly realized the rich prairie sod can be stripped away and used to build homes made of sod, some even two-storied high. As the railway spread westward bringing lumber and glass, the sod houses disappeared (Madson, 1995; Price, 2004). Settlers soon realized the top 42 inches of black organic nutrient rich soil brought about by the synergy of mineral deposits left from an ancient shallow sea and pulsing and retreating Pleistocene glacier melts of two million to eleven thousands years ago combined with the radiant energy from the sun, seed blowing winds, cycles of rainfall, organic decay, and prairie fires that unlocked and returned minerals to replenish the soil, created the richest and finest farm soil in the world (Madson, 1995; Savage, 2004). Today, less than 4% of the tallgrass prairie remains. In my home state of Iowa, only one-tenth of one percent of the native tallgrass prairie still exists (Price, 2004).

As part of environmental concern about preserving original American landscapes, interest in the tallgrass prairie has steadily grown. All around the upper Midwest and great Plain states, prairie restorations are being made by park boards, arboretums, colleges and universities, nature conservatories, and backyard naturalists (Madson, 1995; Madison & Oberle,

1993). Just an hour away to the west from my home in Iowa City is a restored 8,000-acre tallgrass prairie at the Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge near the appropriately named town, Prairie City.

Thirty miles east of Iowa City, in small enclave of Rochester, is a genuine sliver of land considered the finest example of an unshorn, uncurried native oak savannah tallgrass prairie in the state of Iowa. Most conveniently, just a mile north from my home, a tallgrass prairie restoration is underway at the newly created Waterworks Prairie Park. The tallgrass prairie is a place I frequently seek out as a means to immerse myself in beauty, sound, life, and meaning.

In *Specimen Days*, Walt Whitman (1882) recognized the importance of the grasslands when he stated that while the prairie may be less stunning than Yosemite, Yellowstone, or Niagara Falls, the prairies and plains “fill the esthetic sense fuller, precede all the rest, and make the North America’s characteristic landscape . . . what most impressed me, and will longer remain with me, are these same prairies” (p.94). Whitman went on to say that “these prairies . . . will they ever appear in and in some sort form a standard for our poetry and art?” (p. 95). While nature in a source for endless metaphors that may be used to create a deeper meaning and understanding, this story is about the potential of the tallgrass prairie as a metaphor for healing and renewal. I share it only as an example of how landscape narratives

rich with metaphor may serve as a mutual patterning modality.

Metaphoric Unitary Tallgrass Prairie Landscape Narrative

What is it to live between lightning and thunder? What is it to live between the sudden shocking flash of lightning and its rolling crashing earth-shaking rumble of thunder. In 1999, storms chased me to Madison, Wisconsin where I went to attend one-week workshop on Heideggerian Hermeneutics. I left Iowa City amid warnings of impending severe weather. My wife wanted me to wait until the warnings were over, but I wanted to leave and out race the threatening storm to Madison. Darkening thunderclouds billowed on the western horizon. On the way I swung by the new house we were having built because I knew it would be another two weeks before I would see it again and I knew that when I returned, it would be nearly complete.

I raced up Highway 151. All along the way, I kept the storm clouds in my rear view mirror. Streaking bolts of lightning flashed behind me. Yet to my astonishment, when I arrived in Madison, I could see the storm that chased me along the way had already been there. Driving into Madison, I could see the chaos left behind by the storm. Downed tress, tree limbs scattered about, electrical workers were repairing downed power lines. How is it that I could out run a storm and yet and the storm arrive before me? What is in mystery? Can one ever really out run a storm?

Lightning struck again Tuesday morning. News arrived that there was a fire. Our new house under construction burned to the ground. With these words, I dropped to my knees in disbelief. Everyday for months I would go to the house as it was being built to check on the progress. I would sweep away the dust and wood chips between wood beams. Clean up the trash before it became boarded between dry walls. Lying in bed at night, I could close my eyes, picture every detail, and imagine each space upon completion.

Suddenly, it was all ashes. I decided to stay for the rest of the conference. One reason was I knew it would be too much to see what was left, and I had hopes that by the time I returned to Iowa City, the burned out shell would be cleared away and gone.

Listening to Prairies

When will I hear the thunder? Does living between the lightning and the thunder illuminate meaning? Does lightning and thunder speak? How does one know thunder when one hears it? Can a fire from lightning bolts bring renewal? How does a loss become a possibility?

Lightning and thunder speak to prairies. Early French explorers described the heartland or middle North America as an open, endless, empty, undulating, grass covered, treeless landscape of soft rolling hills. Iowa was once all a tallgrass prairie. While the vast Midwest prairie nearly gone, the

prairie is neither lost nor forgotten. The wisdom of the prairie persists.

Then, I knew nothing about the wisdom prairies speak. Searching for meaning amid loss, I needed to spend time away from the conference and so I decided to visit the nearby Curtis Prairie at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum. The power of the prairie is subtle and of surprising natural complexity and beauty. It is a magical world that must be experienced up close. Prairies are pathways for the soul to walk. To walk the prairie is to journey from the swaying green into the deep blue becalmed sky. The prairie path leads to the sky path. "The paths are one" (Quayle, 1905, p. 50).

Dwelling and thinking, walking on dense tufts of grass, I listened to the silence between the lightning and the thunder. This vast perfect openness of grass, sky, and wind. Limitless with no boundaries. At first, I heard the hissing of the grass blowing in the wind. Ocean of billowy green. Swells on swells, lifting then falling. Undulating solid earth. Like endless ocean waves, rippling patterns of bending grasses towering above my head moved across the landscape. Cather's (1918) description of the tallgrass prairie comes to mind when she says "more than anything else, I felt the motion in the landscape; in the fresh, easy-blowing wind, and in the earth itself" (p. 16). The wind is the only chance grass can make music. I'm listening to the chant of the prairie.

Awakened, I see amid this emptiness is abundance. A kalei-

doscope of dozens of different grasses crowd the ground. I was awe struck by the thick carpet of eye high big bluestem, gold stem, Indiangrass, prairie cord grass, ripgut, and sloughgrass, I immersed myself in the short little bluestem, windmill grass, sand lovegrass, blue grama, switch grass, June grass, prairie dropseed, needlegrass, porcupine grass, and purple topstop that brushed against my thighs as I walked through this place of wonder, this endless sea of shades of sage green under a brilliant turquoise sky.

Amid this chaos are rhythmic patterns. What appeared as unruly weeds, on closer look, revealed a highly complex ecosystem. In the grassland ecoregion diversity reigns with 1,595 species of grasses, sedges, and wild flowers, 160 species of butterflies, 122 species birds, 72 species of mammals, 18 species of reptiles, and 13 species of amphibians (Savage, 2004). However, most vivid and interspersed thickly amid these majestic grasses were the wild prairie flowers. To think that endless grass and sky were enough, the burst of color overwhelmed my senses.

Beauty Heals

Prairies speak beauty. The bright warm sun shines on radiant prairiescapes enameled with bursts of floral indigo, lavender, gold, cream, crimson, white, and magenta. I hungrily searched for their lyrical, evocative names. Even the names of the flowers speak beauty. Waves and waves

of lobelia, lupine, New Jersey tea, Turks-cap, yellow star, pasture rose, purple milkwort, sneezeweed, purple avens, Ohio spiderwort, wild bergamot, fringed gentian, black-eyed susan, golden alexanders, purple coneflower, blue flag, cardinal flower, Maximilian sunflower, and butterfly weed bloom and swing as their fragrance is lost in the gusty wind. Birdsfoot violet, blazingstars, purple prairie clover, yellow coneflower, show goldenrod, shooting star, whorled milkweed, kittentails, thimbleweed, bush clover, wild indigo, forget-me-nots, and prairie smoke spring forth. The sun turns tall tiger lilies into flaming torches of color. Prairie flowers come on in waves, each with its own time, some blooming briefly and others persisting for weeks on end.

To walk waist-deep in prairie flowers is to stroll through a fragile fragrant world unlike any other. "From the very first greening of spring to the full ripening of autumn, the prairie is spangled with a vivid progression of flowers" (Madson, 1995, p. 81). White, pink, and lavender of spring; yellow-gold of summer; crimson and bronze of autumn; and the slate of winter (Price, 2004). Except for a short period early in the growing season, the flowers must compete with a rising tide of grasses. The smallest and most delicate appear in the Spring while the taller and coarser flowers blossom in the late summer. Yet, there are a few delicate stalwarts left from Spring that blossom hidden deep in the grasses of late summer (Madson, 1995). Slopes

flooded with pink, white, yellow, purple, and orange sparkle against a carpet green background. Ensnared with wild flowers I fall down on the grass. Beauty heals.

Prairies Gather Community

“One learns a landscape finally not by knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationships in it—like that between the sparrow and the twig” (Lopez, 1988, p. 64). The grasses and flowers gather birds, insects, badgers, rodents, squirrels, prairie dogs, and rabbits. Butterflies flutter from flower to flower. Bees buzz. Grassland birds sing as they fly through the air. The prairie horned lark, lark bunting, bobolink, meadow lark, dickcissel, and longspurs sing while flying because they are no tree perches (Madson, 1995). I watch the red-winged blackbirds flap about. Wrens warbled. Fall and Spring squadrons of migrating Canadian ducks, pelicans, sandhill cranes, whooping cranes, bitterns, egrets, swans, and geese make the Midwest prairie a temporary home. Cotton and jackrabbits leap through the grasses. Prairie chickens, elk, and bison made the tallgrass prairie home until they were hunted to near extinction. However, the rodents still lurk often unseen in the tall grasses. Little critters like jumping mice, ground squirrels, prairie dogs, prairie voles feast on the limitless grasses, forbs, seeds, fruits, and root while foxes, minks, weasels, shrews, badgers, skunks, snakes, owls, and hawks feed on them.

Peering deeply into the grasses, I see that the prairie is teeming, swarming, and bursting with life. Insects buzzing. As many as 10 million insects are in each acre of a tallgrass prairie (Madison, 1995). Flies, locust, grasshoppers, bees, and ants are just some of the thousands of insects that are welcomed by the prairie plants. The prairie gathers community.

Busy blue dragonflies flit from blade to leaf to blade. But, I rather follow the dance of monarch, swallowtail, and buckeye butterflies, bumblebees, and birds while wondering how does this bountiful and beautiful community sustain itself?

Fires in the Heart and on the Heartland

Fire is the oldest story of all. “Birth, growth, decline—that is the arc of fire’s narrative” (Pyne, 2004, p. 20). Little of human life escapes fire’s touch. Fire is the creation of the living world. Life supplies its oxygen, and life furnishes its fuel. Fire exits because the earth holds life. Fire is the source of creation. After all, the universe is made of fire.

Certain Native Americans called it the “Red Buffalo.” Sooner or later, the Red Buffalo comes to feed, a season of fire and rebirth. During the blazing afternoons of midsummer, lightning and thunder speak to the prairie. A fiery furnace of walls of scarlet flame thirty feet tall roar across the prairie fed by the dry grass tinder and pushed by the fast wind. The glow of the fires could be seen for forty miles while

the black smoke darkened the sun driving the animals mad. At night, "along the firelines rise ignitions and exostulations of yellow cinders, my nose fills with the sweet sent of char, and, on the dimmed horizon, the big, blooded moon rises, too smoked to light anything but itself (Heat-Moon, 1991, p. 76).

How does the prairie fire call forth new possibilities? How are prairies places of hope and promise? After spending hours walking through the prairie, I returned to the Arboretum's visitor center looking for answers. Reading through books about prairies, suddenly I had an "eureka" moment. Every four or five years, the staff at the Arboretum deliberately set the prairie on fire. Before the prairie was lost, lightning strikes during thunderstorms started most fires on the prairie. In an instant, there came a sudden insight. The "fire blizzard" is one of the greatest horrors of prairie life, yet, it is the fires that sustains the prairie (Olson & Madson, 2005, p. 18). Prairies and fires co-create one another. As ruinous as the prairie fire may seem, the fire does little damage to the tallgrass prairie. "Fire is a principal ecological process influencing the evolution of numerous plant species in the Great Plains grasslands and a primary disturbance mechanism for sustaining the structure, diversity and productivity" (Brockway, Gatewood & Paris, 2002, p. 135). Burning dead plant materials unlocks their minerals to return to the soil feeding the next generation of grasses and flowers.

The prairie is not a place that shows all, but rather is a vastly exposed place of hiddenness. The actual growing points of the grasses are safe underground and not harmed. Between 60 and 80 percent of the grasses by weight, typically grow below the ground. A 10-foot tall strand of big bluestem is anchored by a 12-foot deep root into the earth (Savage, 2004). The vital processes of the grass are safely dormant in the complex network of roots and rhizomes shielded by the heavy black topsoil.

Grasses are designed to burn. Temperature in the prairie fire may raise to 400 degrees F, but an inch or two beneath the surface, the temperature may only rise a degree or two (Madson, 1995). This immense underground network is the source of survival in times of fire as well as drought. The cycle of death and rebirth, burning and greening, seeding and sprouting is the steady, varied, and faithful renewal gives rise and sustains the prairie (Brown et al., 2005).

New possibilities burst out of the coexistence of prairie and fires. The prairie rises like a phoenix out from the ashen and charred meadows again and again, linking destruction with creation, old growth with new growth. Prairies are places of hope and promise. Prairies are the well-spring of possibilities.

Living in Topsoil

I remember that first day I visited Iowa in 1999 when I stepped out of the Cedar Rapids

airport terminal, stood on the top steps looking out at a seemingly infinite field of freshly tilled black dirt. Then I breathed the air. Heavy, rich smell of earth. A somewhat sweet odor filled my senses, fresh and damp. The smell of rhubarb, something similar to mushrooms enriched with wet Fall leaves composting. Smell of roots.

This product of glacier gouging, bluestem growing, vegetation decaying, earthworm aerating, gopher burrowing, rain soaking, cold freezing, heat thawing, and fire releasing (Stone, 2004). Place of immense wealth and unimaginable bounty. Place of health. Place of transformation. This is where the grass's growing points reside. Growing points, safely hidden and underground in the topsoil, to re-emerge again and again. Topsoil is where rebirth occurs. Topsoil harbors new possibilities.

"You must not be in the prairie, but the prairie must be in you" (Quayle, 1905, p. 30)

On a bright-lit day, I drove back to Iowa City. All along the drive, I thought about whether or not to stop by the place where the house once stood. I really had no intent to stop and see the devastation. But as I neared the exit to what was to be our home in just a few days, I could not help myself. I hoped that what was left of the house would be cleared away by now. As I made the familiar turn, I could see the house was gone. Only the driveway and foundation remained. I drove up the driveway, got out of the car, stood on the edge and peering down into the

basement. A rotting scent of wet charred cinders rose from the ashes. There, in a heap of twisted metal, broken glass, melted vinyl siding, and burnt lumber were the last blackened remains. However, peering deeply into the heap's hiddenness, instead I saw the deep-rooted growing points of the tall grasses and wild flowers in the prairie's rich topsoil.

Bur Oak

Now, here I sit here writing these words some 6 years later in the very place that pile of burnt remains once stood. It took five months to the day to rebuild this house, and there is no place I rather call home. There will always be more firestorms to endure. When the storms threaten, I return to the relic of an old oak savanna tallgrass prairie down the road from Iowa City in Rochester, Iowa. Tallgrass savannas are the transition points between the forests and the prairie. Commonly, bur oaks dot the savanna are there because "the bur oak is the only tree that can stand up to a prairie fire and live" (Leopold, 1989, p. 26). The bur oak's thick crust of corky bark shields the trunk from fire, and its deep roots save it from drought. When storms gather, I think about this prairie, the grass, the rich topsoil, and my roots knowing those with roots in deep black soil can weather storms and endure as new possibilities arise.

I heard and dwelled with the voices that live between lightning and thunder. Now, I'm at ease as "the prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I

rest easy in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart” (Sandburg, 1996, p.176).

I breathe in prairie as prairie breathes in me.

Metaphoric Unitary Landscape Narratives as a Voluntary Mutual Patterning Modality

I have long held, as Cody (2000) illustrated, that a nursing conceptual frame of reference is also a way of personal knowing since it serves as a way to understand oneself as a nurse. Rogerian science not only guides my professional practice by providing the conceptual lens that allows me to *think nursing*, Rogerian science also informs my way of being in the universe. Thus, Rogers’ postulates and principles informed my interpretation and representation of the tallgrass prairie landscape.

Unitary science was woven into and throughout the tallgrass narrative. For example, energy as the fundamental unit of the living and nonliving is reflected in the notion that everything comes from fire. Lightning and fire are both powerful manifestations of energy. Openness is represented in numerous images of the prairie as an endless ocean of grass. Since everything is pattern, all the descriptions of the wildflowers, grasses, wildlife, and the continuous changing nature of color over the seasons are all examples of manifestations of pattern. Pandomensionality was represented at the onset of the narrative in describing the nonlinear nature of the storm that chased me to Madison,

Wisconsin. The storm had already arrived.

Integrality echoed throughout the narrative. The oneness of sky and grass, fire and life, soil and new growth, and especially the interconnectedness of the relationships of grasses, flowers, and all the living creatures that form the tallgrass prairie community, all illuminate the integral nature of human beings and their environment. In addition, idea of being immersed in beauty and the healing nature of beauty reflects human-environmental mutual process. The powerful notion of not just being in the prairie, but the prairie being within (you are your landscape) is another of images and ideas that point to the principle of integrality.

Resonancy is also woven throughout the narrative. Images of constant motion, undulation of the grasses, cycles or seasonal changes and transformation, cycles of death and rebirth are all rhythmical patterns of continuous change. Finally, helicity is reflected in the unpredictable nature of change, the inherent complexity, innovativeness, and diversity of life as well as the tallgrass prairie.

Flowing with Turbulence

The theory of kaleidoscoping in life’s turbulence (Butcher, 1993) derived from Rogers’ (1992) postulates and principles provides a theoretical context for understanding the use of unitary metaphoric landscape narratives as a voluntary mutual patterning modality. Kaleidoscoping is defined as “flowing with turbulent manifesta-

tions of patterning” (Butcher, 1993, p. 186). Turbulence is a dissonant commotion in the human-environmental mutual field process. Turbulent life events are situations clients consider as traumatic, painful, or difficult. In the tallgrass narrative, the turbulent storm on the horizon foreshadowed the traumatic experience of the house burning down. The fire, of course, is a representation of any turbulent or traumatic life experience. However, the prairie fire, as a metaphoric representation of the house fire, placed the meaning of the loss into an entirely new context, one of renewal, rebirth, growth, transformation, and new possibilities.

Flowing is “intense harmonious involvement in the human-environmental mutual field process” (Butcher, 1993, p. 190). The idea of flow within the theory of kaleidoscoping with turbulence change was derived from Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) model of flow posits that total immersion in activities that require high degrees of involvement concentration and are experienced as highly enjoyable, meaningful, or aesthetic are associated with a sense of well-being. Flow involves deep participation in an activity and according to Csikszentmihalyi (1990) can be beneficial in making “life more rich, intense, and meaningful”(p. 70). Becoming immersed in meaning flow activities, paying attention to what is happening, and enjoying the immediate experience are all ways that can help transform potential threats and experiences of turbulence into enjoyable chal-

lenges and assist in recovering a sense of harmony.

Literature, art, music, dance, cinema, gardening, exercise meditation, sports, swimming, and photography, as well as a host of other activities people can be deeply involved in, are all potential patterning modalities that are postulated to enhance flowing with turbulent life events (Butcher, 1993). Likewise, the process of writing, reading, sharing, or experiencing meaningfully constructed metaphoric landscape narratives, has the potential enhance flow, facilitate knowing participation in one’s own change process, and restore a sense of harmony.

The experience of being immersed in the tallgrass prairie was, for me, a flow experience. Because the tallgrass prairie holds particular deep meaning for me, the process of writing the narrative was also a flow experience. Imagery and memory helped be re-experience the deep sense of enjoyment I have each time I visit the nearby tallgrass prairies.

Writing Landscape Narratives and Meaning-Making

Metaphoric landscape narratives are a specific form of expressive emotional writing. The large number of studies demonstrating the health benefits of expressive emotional writing was summarized in Butcher (2004). In addition, the insights gained from hearing stories that resonate with meaning and connect one’s own experience, offers a powerful way to increase awareness of one’s own life process.

Unitary metaphoric landscape narratives are energetic patterning modalities with the potential to transform human-environmental pattern manifestations by enhancing accelerating meaning-making and knowing participation in change. As meaning transports, reading, hearing, or creating one's own metaphoric landscape narratives has the potential to enhance meaning making. As new understanding and meaning unfolds from the connecting with narratives rich with meaning, a new shift in perception may emerge as one meaning pattern is transformed into another (Carlsen, 1996; Mahoney, 2003). With a new sense of awareness, persons are free to choose if and how they want to participate in their own change process (Barrett, 1998). In other words, meaning-making potentates knowing participation in change.

Co-creating the Metaphoric Unitary Landscape Narratives

Gaydos (2005) offers a model for creating and using personal narrative in nursing practice that may be adapted for voluntary mutual patterning. The process is a "co-creative aesthetic process" that includes four aspects: engagement, mutuality, movement, and new form. The process may be initiated by asking client's to describe a difficult situation that they overcame, endured, and feel helped them grow. Engagement occurs when the nurse and client spend time for the specific purpose of telling and hearing the story. Mutuality is demonstrated through

the appreciation, compassion, empathy, authenticity, honoring, commitment, and respect conveyed by the nurses in the telling and listening to the narrative. Movement is the moment to moment rhythmical and "synchronous going back and forth"(Gaydos, 2005, p. 258) between the nurse and client as the telling of the story unfolds. The nurse makes notes of metaphors, meaningful symbols, and imagery expressed in the telling of the story. The nurse can make observations and share insight about the possible meanings expressed in the story and point how memories may be connected. As new meanings arise, the personal narrative takes on new form. Client's can be asked to write their story. Examples, such as the landscape narrative in this paper, can be shared with the clients as an example of how their story can be metaphorically connected whatever aspects in nature that holds particular meaning for them.

Following the insights by Abram (1996) about the need to reconnect with the "animistic, sensuous universe" (p. 121), unitary landscape narratives are written to enhance the flow experience by vividly bringing alive the characteristics, consciousness, and wisdom of plants, animals, and beauty of the landscape. The more alive the story, the more vital and stirring will be our encounters with it (Abram, 1996). Encounters with the beauty and meaningfulness of scripted vivid and sensuous landscape narratives can fill us with passion, grace us with joy, and light up our existence. Immersed in

landscape, and suddenly, we are bewitched, and dazzled. The beauty brightens the darkness of despair, and its colorful spontaneity can regenerate one's life (Butcher, 1993; Serrucci, 1990).

For me, the unitary nature of fire and the tallgrass prairie serves as a continual source of inspiration. Although the original seed of inspiration occurred when our home that was under construction burned, I have found my re-experiencing the insights revealed in the tallgrass metaphor narrative serves as a continual inspiration to endure turbulent or traumatic events. In addition, sharing metaphorical landscape narratives of over coming and enduring adversity may help client's gain some insight into their own experience or may serve as an inspiration to create their own metaphorical narratives.

Lets sit down here . . . on the open prairie, where we can't see a highway or a fence. Let's have no blankets to sit on, but feel the ground with our bodies, the earth, the yielding shrubs. Let's have the grass for a mattress, experiencing its sharpness and its softness. Let us become like stones, plants, and trees. Let us be animals, think and feel like animals. Listen to the air. You can hear it, feel it, smell it, taste it. Woniya wakan—the holy air—which renews all by its breath. Woniya, woniya wakan---spirit, life, breath, renewal—it means all that. Woniya—we sit together, don't touch, but some-

thing is there; we feel it between us, as a presence. A good way to start thinking about nature, talk about it. Rather talk to it, talk to the rivers, to the lakes, to the winds as to our relatives.

John Fire Lane Deer
in Deer & Erdoes (1972, p. 119)

Listen to and write the wisdom landscapes speak. Think metaphoric, become metamorphic.

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